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COMEDIE DES COMEDIENS

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THE WORKS OF

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

VOLUME THREE

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY

PROFESSOR F. C. DE SUMICHRAST

Department of French, Harvard University

THE GROTESQUES

FRANÇOIS VILLON, THÉOPHILE DE VIAU,
SAINT-AMANT, CYRANO DE BERGERAC,
GEORGE DE SCUDÉRY, PAUL SCARRON

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

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The Grotesques

THE GROTESQUES

Introduction

THE articles contained in this volume originally appeared in the review *La France littéraire*, of which Charles Malo was the editor. It was in December, 1833, that Gautier signed a contract with Malo to furnish him with twelve articles which should together form a complete account of the old French poets. The title agreed upon — *Exhumations littéraires* — indicates that the authors to be treated of were every one of them forgotten. Eleven years later the essays were collected and republished in book form, the last one, that on Paul Scarron, having but just before made its appearance in the pages of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. This first edition was in two volumes octavo, and contained twelve papers; the Charpentier edition contains ten only. Of these the most characteristic have been translated here.

The title selected in the beginning was not adhered to when the work appeared in book form, being

changed to *Les Grotesques*, which it has ever since retained. It is a striking title, but it does not accurately describe the contents of the volume, or even the majority of the authors treated of by the critic; for no student of literature nowadays would dream of calling that great poet, Villon, a grotesque; and Théophile de Viau, while infinitely less great than Villon, is also a writer of mark, as indeed Gautier himself has been careful to point out. Cyrano de Bergerac is absurd and extravagant very often, but not absolutely grotesque in the true sense of the word. To have called him burlesque and to have applied the same epithet to Scarron and Scudéry would have been justifiable, but the expression "burlesque" did not convey any peculiar meaning in 1833, while "grotesque" did, and awakened recollections, still very vivid, of the most radical portions of the Romanticist profession of faith.

It was in 1827 that Victor Hugo — already famous and already recognised as the head of the new school that was merrily and noisily attacking the strongholds in which the Classicists were intrenched — published his drama "Cromwell." The play itself could not be performed, owing to its great length, apart from a

certain lack of appropriateness to other exigencies of the stage. But the "Preface" eclipsed the play, and drew to itself the attention of both literary parties then contending for supremacy in France. It was a manifesto, — a bold declaration of principles and aims, written in a vigorous, trenchant style, sparing none of the idols of the Classicists, and setting up, with much pomp, splendour, and acclamation, new gods to be worshipped.

The most original part of the "Preface" was that bearing upon the "grotesque" and its legitimate place in art. "In modern thought," said Victor Hugo, "the grotesque plays an all-important part. It is omnipresent: on the one hand it gives birth to deformity and repulsiveness, on the other to comicality and buffoonery. It weaves innumerable novel superstitions around religion; countless picturesque inventions around poesy. The grotesque it is which scatters lavishly in air, water, earth, and fire the myriads of intermediary beings which live in the popular traditions of the Middle Ages; which sends whirling through the darkness the terrifying dance of the witches' sabbath, which provides Satan with horns, cloven hoofs, and bats' wings." And, after enthusias-

tically dwelling upon the æsthetic and literary value of the grotesque in art, upon the absolute necessity which exists for never omitting it from a picture intended to represent life in its real aspect, Hugo continues: "In the new poetry, while the soul, penetrated by Christian morality, shall be represented by the sublime, the grotesque shall represent the animal side of man. The former, freed from all impure alloy, shall possess charm, grace, beauty; for it must be capable one day of creating Juliet, Desdemona, Ophelia. The other shall take to itself the ridiculous, the weak, the ugly. In the dividing up of humanity and creation, its share shall be passions, vices, crimes; it shall be lust, servility, gluttony, avarice, treachery, quarrelsomeness, and hypocrisy; it shall be, in turns, Iago, Tartuffe, Basile; Polonius, Harpagon, Bartholo; Falstaff, Scapin, Figaro. There is but one standard of beauty; there are innumerable forms of ugliness." And again: "From art it passes into manners; and while on the one hand it makes the masses applaud the clown in the play, on the other hand it later presents kings with court-jesters; in the very age of etiquette, it exhibits Scarron by the side of the couch of Louis XIV."

Gautier fairly worshipped Hugo, and the "Preface"

had very deeply impressed him, as more than one passage in "The Grotesques" abundantly proves. These forgotten poets, then, appealed to him, partly on account of the effects which might be drawn from their works and which went to support the theory Hugo had developed, partly on account of their seeming to have been harshly and even unjustly dealt with by the great critic of the seventeenth century, Boileau; whose judgments had remained practically unquestioned until that time. Without being, perhaps, as prejudiced as his comrades in Romanticism, Gautier, nevertheless, largely shared the prevailing abhorrence of the autocrat of Parnassus, and was ready enough to exalt the forgotten poets at the expense of the critic and the school he represents so worthily and with such dignity.

But Gautier, even as a young writer and an enthusiastic Romanticist, had a literary conscience, was possessed of literary taste, and was naturally inclined to tell the truth without allowing himself to be swayed consciously by prejudice or antipathy. The result is that his work confirms, on the whole, the verdict of Boileau; and that the lack of taste, which is the most conspicuous reason of the forgetfulness which

has fallen to the lot of these Grotesques, the absurdity and the extravagance of which they are frequently guilty, made him feel that any attempt to put them on a high pedestal must be fraught with failure. The one exception to this is, of course, Villon, whom the unanimous opinion of the age ranks with the other great poets of France.

But if Gautier could not and did not seek to wholly reverse the judgments of Boileau, he succeeded in making the readers of his own and of succeeding generations appreciate in these minor poets many a forgotten beauty, and in giving such vivid reproductions of the men and their times that every one, Cyrano de Bergerac, Saint-Amant, Scarron, and the others actually live in his pages. He has written criticisms keen, bright, interesting; full of brilliant passages, of evocations of bygone times, of restoration of forgotten modes of thought; he has made intelligible the fame which most of these men enjoyed in their day, — and all this without once wearying the reader, but, on the contrary, maintaining his interest and exciting his curiosity.

As his first attempt in literary criticism, "The Grotesques" would have a value of its own, but

beyond the curiosity which attaches to the *début* of a great writer in a new field, the studies of Gautier have permanent and well recognised worth. At a time when Villon was not known as he deserved to be, the chapter on this poet did much to attract attention to him and to the deeply personal and pathetic character of a large part of his verse. Théophile de Viau was judged solely on the ridiculous couplet cited, and justly so, as an example of phenomenal bad taste, but few, if any, had the least idea that he was nevertheless a poet of great parts and of, at times, fine inspiration. That there was anything in Saint-Amant besides praise of gross feeding and hard drinking did not occur to the average reader, while Cyrano de Bergerac, to whom a modern dramatist owes his fame, was merely a big-nosed swashbuckler.

Gautier cleared up a number of misconceptions, swept away some errors, and gave a clearer view of a period in which, though it was not graced by poetic genius, there were many writers of merit and worth. He has not unsuccessfully essayed to show the causes of the admiration felt for these men; an admiration due to tastes differing from ours, to habits much unlike ours, to a state of society and a condition of manners

which we can but with difficulty comprehend at the present day. And withal he had not the least intention — indeed, he expressly declares it, — to propose these authors as models to be followed by his generation. They were interesting, instructive, curious, pleasant to read, but not modern. Presenting, no doubt, many a feature which made the Romanticists — then in the zenith of their reputation and their power — akin to them in many respects, yet they did not seem to the critic worth imitating. The exquisite artistic sense which was so rapidly maturing in him, and which had dictated so many of the beautiful pages in his early and daring romance, the rich poetic feeling which was later to give the world "Enamels and Cameos," could not possibly be satisfied with the compositions of writers who, if they possessed pearls, did not know how to turn them to account, who, if they hit upon a dramatic situation, were incapable of making adequate use of it.

Gautier pointed out — what is of common knowledge now — that Molière borrowed one of his most famous scenes from fighting Cyrano, but the very extract which he gives suffices, without reading the deadly dull "Tricked Pedant," to show the utter

inferiority of de Bergerac, the would-be dramatist, to Molière, the prince of comic writers. If he recalls de Vigny when speaking of Saint-Amant, it is not that he believes the latter equals the former as a poet, but merely to show how ideas, unworked or poorly wrought out by his "Grotesques," have reappeared, splendid and luminous, in the verse of men of genius.

Gautier is not a Sainte-Beuve, he does not equal the great critic of the nineteenth century, but he unquestionably writes very admirable criticisms and very able studies of writers and their works, in a style which Sainte-Beuve might have envied, so full of life, fire, colour, and poetry is it. To read Gautier is to enjoy a rich intellectual treat in which the senses themselves have a part.

François Villon

THE GROTESQUES

I

FRANÇOIS VILLON

THE study of second-rate poets is both delightful and interesting, because, first, as they are less known and read, there are more novelties to be found in them; and next, because there is not a ready-made judgment for every striking passage. One has not to go into conventional ecstasies, to be convulsed, or to start with delight at certain places, as is indispensable with poets who have become classics.

The reading of these lesser poets is unquestionably somewhat more recreative than is that of acknowledged celebrities, for it is in these second-rate poets — I think I may affirm this without indulging in a paradox — that the greatest originality and eccentricity are to be met with. Indeed, that is why they are second-rate. To be a great poet, at least in the ordinary acceptation of the words, a man must address

the masses and influence them. It is only general ideas which make an impression upon the crowd. Every one likes to come accross his own thoughts in the poet's song. This explains why the stage is so hostile to the eccentricities of fancy. The most belauded passages of poets are usually commonplace. Ten lines by Byron upon love, or the short duration of life, or any other equally stale subject, will gain more admirers than the most weird visions of Jean Paul or of Hoffman. The reason is that many people have been or are in love, that many more are afraid to die, and that there are very few who have seen pass, even in their dreams, the fantastic silhouettes of the German story-tellers.

Among the second-rate poets one finds everything that the aristocrats of the Ark have disdained to make use of, — the grotesque, the fantastic, the trivial, the ignoble, the daring sally, the newly coined word, the popular proverb, the pompous metaphor; in a word, bad taste in its entirety, with its lucky hits, with its plated ware which might be gold, with its bits of glass which might be diamonds. Pearls are scarcely found elsewhere than in a dunghill, as witness Ennius. For myself, I prefer the pearls of the old Roman to

all the gold of Virgil. It takes a very great heap of gold to make the worth of a small handful of pearls.

I take singular pleasure in unearthing a fine line from the work of a despised poet. It seems to me that his unhappy shade must rejoice and be consoled at seeing his thought understood at last. I rehabilitate him, I do him justice; and if at times my praise of some obscure poet appears exaggerated to certain of my readers, let them remember that I praise these writers in order to make up for all those who have insulted them beyond reason, and that undeserved contempt provokes and justifies excessive panegyrics. When reading one of these poets — reputed poor, thanks to the judgment of a college pedant — one comes at every step upon picturesque accidents which cause a pleasant surprise. It is just as if, when travelling along a road which one has been told is white with sunshine and dust, one met here and there beautiful green trees, hedges full of flowers and songbirds, running waters, and perfumed breezes. All these things would seem the more beautiful because the less expected. A silver coin picked up in the street gives greater pleasure than a gold piece in a drawer.

Saint-Amand, Théophile, Du Bartas are full of such surprises. Their brilliant thoughts stand out more vigorously than those of other and more perfect poets, no doubt, because of the inferiority of the rest of the work; just as the night sky causes the stars, invisible at noon, to twinkle brightly.

Master François Villon, the author of "The Lesser Testament" and "The Great Testament," is — in spite of Étienne Pasquier, Antoine du Verdier, and some other pedants, in spite of the forgetfulness, or rather the desuetude, into which he has fallen because of his obsolete language and the obscurity of his allusions — the member of that numerous family in whose work one comes upon the greatest number of lucky finds of this sort; and yet, strange to tell, the poor scholar Villon is scarce known save through the two rather ridiculous verses of Boileau Despréaux, —

> "Villon first managed, in these uncouth ages,
> To clear up the muddled art of our old romancers."

It is likely that Boileau had not the faintest idea of what Villon was, and had not read a single line of his. Certainly the ascetic poet of His Most Christian Majesty would not have found these verses to his taste, he whose ears were so jansenistically alarmed

at the sound of the cynical rimes of that bold poet Mathurin Régnier.

Villon, who, according to Boileau, cleared up the muddled art of our old romancers, did not write a single romance or anything resembling one. He is a satirical soul, a philosopher-poet, a different vein of whom Marot and Régnier have each exploited, but he is assuredly not a romancer. This distich, and two or three others of about the same value, repeated imperturbably, have become axioms, and it is by them that many persons, otherwise well informed, judge our ancient literature.

Since the publication of Boileau's "Art of Poetry," criticism has progressed a good deal. We are not so easily satisfied, and we do not settle an author's place by means of a line formulated as a proverb; but criticism commits, in our opinion, the great mistake of attaching itself only to established reputations which no one attacks. It takes account of the princes of poetry only, and troubles very little about the popular and the middle-class writers. It is like historians, who fancy they have written the history of a nation, when they have compiled the life of a prince. Assuredly Master de Scudéry has as large a place in the age

of Richelieu as good Pierre Corneille. His swash-buckler style is by no means out of place by the side of the Castilian arts and chivalric fashions of the sublime author of "The Cid." The surest way to become acquainted with an epoch is to study its portraits and characters. Corneille is the portrait, Scudéry the character. No one, that I am aware of, has written Scudéry's biography or analysed his works.

But what I have just said about Scudéry in no wise applies to François Villon. Villon was the greatest poet of his time; and now, after the lapse of so many years, after so many changes in manners and in style, through the old words, through the irregularly scanned verses, through the barbarous turns, the poet shines as the sun through the clouds, like an old painting from which the varnish has been removed.

Almost alone among all the Gothic writers Villon has any ideas. Everything is not sacrificed in his work to the exigencies of a literary form which has been purposely made difficult. He is free from those eternal descriptions of spring which flourish in ballads and fabliaux, nor does his verse consist merely of complaints of the cruelty of some fair lady who

refuses to grant the favour of love. His is a new, strong, simple poetry, a good-natured muse which does not look prudish when a coarse word is spoken; which goes to the wine-shop and even elsewhere, and would not scruple to put your purse in its pocket, — for I am bound to confess it, Villon was a past master in the art of burglary, and spoke slang at least as well as French. Our poet was a jovial chap:

> "Born to be hanged, as every one could see,
> But, barring that, the best of fellows he."

His libertine, vagabond life necessarily told upon his talent, and gave it a peculiar cast; he has indeed a distinct, unmistakable colour which distinguishes him from other poets, and he deserved that Régnier should imitate him in his magnificent satire on the brothel. The one mark which Villon has left in history is a decree by which he was condemned to be hanged with five or six good fellows of his kind. Very lucky was it for him that he did not suffer from talkativeness, as he himself says. He appealed from the sentence of the Châtelet Court to the High Court of Parliament, and the penalty was commuted into banishment pure and simple. He withdrew, so it is claimed, —

"To Saint-Generou,
Near Saint-Julian-des-Vouentes,
In the marshes of Bretagne or Poictou,"

where are to be found "handsome and pleasant wenches," — an indispensable matter for a damned libertine like Villon. He led at Saint-Generou the same life as at Ruel and Paris, the ordinary scenes of his exploits. Any other man, after having shaved the gibbet so closely, would have mended his ways, but apparently Villon was incorrigible, for we find that Louis XI, on his return from Flanders, caused him, by express favour, to be released from the prison of Meung, wherein Bishop Thibault d'Aussigny had him immured for having robbed a sacristy. He had made up his mind to die, and had composed the following axiomatic epitaph in single rimes : —

"A Frenchman I, which grieves me sore, born in Paris, near Pontoise. And now a rope a fathom long shall teach my neck my buttocks' weight."

It will be seen that he cared little enough whether or not he was made into an earring for Mistress Gibbet. He had even rimed a beautiful ballad, in which he represents himself by anticipation as having been actually hanged with five or six of his band : —

"Sodden'd by rains and washed are we;
Blacken'd and dried by sun's hot rays.
Our eyes pick'd out by pie and crow
And pluck'd each hair of head and brow,
Never for a moment still are we:
Hither and thither, with change of wind,
Driven about sans rest or stay;
No thimble dinted as peck'd are we.
Brethren, your jeers repress, we pray,
And: God assoil ye, rather say."

He speaks like a connoisseur; he knows the gallows thoroughly; and the victim thereon, in all its aspects, profile, and perspective, is singularly familiar to him. Colin de Cayeux and René de Montigny, his comrades, had been stupid enough to come to their death in their boots, as may be seen in one of the ballads of the "Jargon," and he himself could scarcely expect to die in his bed. I fancy I can see him, thin, pale, ragged, turning around the scaffold as the point to which his life must come, and piteously contemplating his good friends, who were figuring a capital I and sticking their tongues out merely because they had gone to have some fun at Ruel. Notice the term, the euphuism of it, — have some fun! What the devil did those people do when they were seriously at work, since they were presented with a hemp necktie simply

for having had some fun? The fun of Villon was swindling, stealing, gorging in well-famed places and in others, fighting with the watch and the citizens, — nothing less could be fun for such a man. And yet in his verse he sets himself up as a counsellor of morals.

> "To you I speak, comrades in debauch —
> Disease of souls and of the body joy —
> Keep you safe from the cursed tan
> That turns men black when they are dead,"

says he, after an admirable homily addressed by him to all debauchees, thieves, and other nice people. Pray note, I beg you, that expression, *the cursed tan that turns men black when they are dead.* It is the result of close observation, and shows that the author is thoroughly up in the subject of which he treats. Besides, he puts it very politely. He does not say brutally, "Look out and don't get hanged;" he has too much self-respect for that. The piece which precedes these verses is entitled, "A Ballad of Good Doctrine for Those of Evil Life." We cannot resist the pleasure of transcribing it.

> "Indulgence peddler, whether you be,
> Loader of dice, or gambler free,
> Or counterfeit coiner, sure you 'll be

Scalded as they in water hot.
Perjured traitors, void of faith;
Whether you rob, plunder, or steal,
To whom, think you, goes the profit?
To taverns and wenches, every whit.

"Rime and rail, hustle and fight,
With your vicious like be day and night,
Fool that you are, hypocrite and shameless;
Be clown and wizard, play the flute,
Perform in cities and eke in towns
Farce, or show, or moralities:
Win, if you will, at table, glic, and bowls —
Ever 't will go — hear me tell it —
To taverns and girls, every bit.

"Keep far away from filth so vile:
Till the ground, the fields and meadows mow;
Tend and groom or horse or mule,
If never you have been to school:
Enough shall you have if you take to these.
But if hemp you crush and hemp you draw,
All your labour shall but benefit
The girls and the taverns, every whit.

ENVOI

"Hose and doublets full of points,
Gowns and garments of every kind,
Ere you do worse, carry them all
To taverns and wenches, one and all."

It will be seen that if he sins, it is not for want of knowing what is right, — but what would you have?

"... In deep poverty
(So says the popular saw)
Look not for too much loyalty.
. . . . .
Necessity leads to evil life
As wolf by hunger is driven from woods."

Villon does not fail, every time the opportunity occurs, to return to this thought, and even amid all the lamentations over his wretchedness and the regrets he expresses that he has not been virtuous, he fully justifies these two verses of Mathurin, —

"... Naught so punishes
A vicious man as vice itself."

Besides, it would seem that poverty was an hereditary failing in his family.

"Poor have I been from my youth up;
Lonely my birth and poor:
Little wealth my sire did own,
And his sire too, Horatius hight.
For poverty has tracked and haunted us.
On graves of my forbears every one
(May God to Himself their souls uptake!)
Never a crown or sceptre shows."

He lost his father early, and it was his uncle who brought him up, and who treated him with all possible tenderness.

"... My more than father,
Master Guillaume de Villon,
More gentle to me than any mother."

Certainly, Villon was not born to be a cut-purse; he had a fine soul, accessible to all good sentiments. Every time he speaks of his mother it is in a strain of exquisite sensibility.

"... My poor mother
Who through me bitter pain did know,
God wots, and many a sad hour here below."

He maintained three young orphans: —

"Also, by pity moved, I leave
To three little chaps that naked be,
Named in this my present scroll,
The better known thus they may be —
Poor little orphans, of all bereft,
And naked as earthworm is:
I order that they be so furnishèd
That this winter through at least they live."

These three orphans were Colin Laurens, Girard Gosseyn, and Jehan Marceaux. He mentions them several times.

"Upon this trip of mine I 've learned
That these three poor orphans mine
Have grown and are gaining age.
. . . . .

Now will I that to school they go.
Where? To Master Peter Richer's;
For them Donatus is too hard, I trow.
. . . . .
My long tabard in two I cut,
And will that half thereof be sold,
And therewithal to buy them cates,
For youth a sweet tooth ever has."

He counsels them to work, —

"Evil, for the strong, is that sweet sleep
That leads the young to ease in youth;
So that at last they wake and work, in truth,
When they should rest as age doth creep."

Villon does not indulge too much in fine maxims. "Do what I say, not what I do." If he had been placed in other circumstances, and had used for good all the wit and all the genius which he spent for ill, there is no doubt that he would have left in history other traces than those of the decree condemning him, in due legal form, to be hanged high and close, like the wicked rascal that he was; but mayhap we should have lost the poet if we had gained the honest man. Good poets are rarer than honest people even, although these are not very common.

Notwithstanding the lack of documents, it is easy to write a very detailed life of Villon. He is an egotist

poet, and *I* and *me* recur very frequently in his verse. He speaks of himself, confesses his sins with charming artlessness, looks back upon his life, takes pleasure in the remembrances of his youth and of the good times he has had. He talks about death, about virtue, about everything; for the poor scholar invented, under Louis XI, the discursive poetic form in which Byron wrote his "Don Juan." Like the noble lord's poem, the "Testament" of the low-class thief is in octaves. The interlacing of the rimes is almost the same; there is the same mingling of seriousness and raillery, of enthusiasm and of commonplace. Next to a page wet with tears comes a chaplet of absurdities and conundrums as wretched as the puns of the English nobleman; the effect produced by a suave painting is destroyed by a grotesque sketch in Callot's manner. One description leads to another. The ironical bequests follow each other uninterruptedly. To this man a ballad, to that one a rondeau, to another an old shoe or a shaving-dish; all the caprices of the most erratic fancy are to be found in the two Testaments of Villon. For there are two, the Lesser and the Great. But the point in which the two poets — placed, one at the foot of the ladder, the other at the top — most

resemble each other is in the bitter disenchantment, the sad, deep glance cast upon things of this world, the regret for the past, the feeling for what is beautiful and good which survives the apparent degradation, the loss of all illusion, and the desperate melancholy which is the result thereof. Villon, because of his habitually ignoble life, mourns with less elegance than Brummel's fashionable rival, but his cry of pain, though not modulated with so much art, is none the less true and painful.

"In the year thirty of my age,
When deep I drank of every shame,
Not born all fool, nor yet all sage;
Spite of much woe that to me came,
Whereof no part was spared to me
By hand of Thibault d'Aussigny."

(It is from this passage that we learn the exact date of Villon's birth. He was born in 1431, the "Testament" having been composed in 1461.)

"Sinner am I, and know it well;
Yet God doth not my death desire,
But that I change and righteous live;
Plainer than any by sin attacked —
Although for sin Himself did die —
God truly sees, and His mercy great —
If conscience make me grieve for sin —
By His good grace full pardon grants.

"If by my death the common weal
Could profit aught in any way,
To die the death of vilest men
Myself I 'd doom, so God help me !
Harm I do not to old or young,
Whether they live or eke be dead :
Never do mountains their places change
Forward or back for a beggar's sake.

. . . . . .

"The least of those akin to me
Come forward and me disown ;
Forgetful of all natural ties,
Because no wealth by me is owned.

. . . . . .

"God knows that had I studied
In my hot, mad days of youth,
And lived aright, now in good sooth
House and soft couch should I own.
But woe is me ! from school I fled,
Just as still does a naughty boy ;
And now as these sad words I pen
My poor heart nigh to breaking comes.

. . . . . .

"My days have passed away,
As Job doth say."

It is not possible for a man to speak more convincingly, and to express himself in a more bitter and touching fashion. Then he looks around, and finding himself alone, he says, —

"Where are now the gallants full of grace
With whom I walked in days of youth,
Who sang so well and spoke so fair,
Who joked and laughed so merrily?
Some now are dead and laid out stark —
Nothing is left of them by now.
Others have entered Paradise —
All that are left may good God save!

"Others again by now have grown,
God be thanked, to lords and sires;
But others, nude, on roads do beg,
And bread they know by sight alone.
And others yet, in cloistered cells,
Are monks Carthusian, Celestine,
Booted and hosed in wretched shape —
And these the varied fates of all!"

This trait, *And bread they know by sight alone*, could occur only to a man who has starved more than once. Villon, who was hungry to death three-quarters of his life long, always speaks of any kind of food with singular emotion and respect; consequently all culinary details — and they are numerous — are lovingly mentioned and caressed. Gastronomic nomenclature abounds in every part, —

"Sauces and broth, and great fat fish,
Flawns and tarts, poached eggs and fried,
Scrambled and served in many ways.
. . . . .

"Savoury morsels and delicate,
Capons and pigeons and fatted hens,
Perch, and chickens, all white meat.
. . . . .
"And every day a fatted goose,
Or else a capon rich with fat."

An amusing thing is the grudge he bears to Thibault d'Aussigny, not because Thibault kept him in prison and wanted to hang him, but because he made him drink cold water and eat dry bread, —

"Upon a small loaf he fed me
And water cold a summer long.
Free handed or close, mean was he to me:
God requite him as he treated me!
. . . . .
"Thank God, and thank Jacques Thibault too,
Who made me drink cold water so;
And in a dungeon deep, not one on high,
Made me a gag so often chew."

On the other hand, the gratitude which he expresses for a certain Perrot Girard, a barber by profession, who gave him fat pork to eat for a whole week, is worth noting. He is as stout a drunkard as he is a stout eater. He knows that den, the Pine Cone, and other taverns of the day better than any other man. To

mix water with wine appears to him an unpardonable crime, and he is far from dreading the gallows as much as he does a thin drink.

Next to the bottle and the stewpan, he thought much of death. He constantly refers to it, and his reflections, always deep and philosophical, are clothed in surprisingly energetic and accurate language. Hard though life has been for him, he clings to it, and cries like Mæcenas, "I care not, provided I live." Before La Fontaine, he found out that "Better is a live clown than a dead emperor."

This is the way he puts it, —

> "Better live poor in coarse stuff clad,
> Than lord to have been and in fine tomb rot."

He tries to find consolation in the thought that his fate is the common fate of all: —

> "So I am not, this well I know,
> An angel's son, and do not wear
> A starry crown upon my brow.
> My sire is dead; God rest his soul!
> His corpse below a stone doth lie;
> My mother too will die, I trow —
> She knows it well, the poor old dame —
> Nor shall her son on earth remain.

"I know that rich and poor alike,
Scholars or fools, cleric or lay,
Nobles and clowns, the free, the mean,
The great, the small, the fair, the plain,
The dames that wear their ruffs so high,
Whatever their station in life may be,
Padding their figure, painting their face,
Shall Death catch up, and none escape.

"And whether Paris or Helen die,
Whoever dieth does so in pain
So great that breath it takes away;
The gall it bursts upon his heart,
Then sweats he, God! a hideous sweat,
And from his ills no rest doth find.
For never a brother, or child or sister,
At such a time would stand his bail.

"Death makes him shudder and grow pale,
Draws in his nose, his veins doth stretch;
Makes his neck swell, his flesh grow weak,
Stretches joints and nerves doth strain.
Thou feminine frame, that tender art,
Polished, and delicate, and most rare,
Must thou these dread ills all await?
Ay, forsooth, or to heaven pass alive."

Then follow three ballads, magnificent in their monotony, upon one and the same thought, with the same recurring refrain. In the first the poet asks what has become of the beautiful women of the days of yore, of Flora, the handsome Roman, of Thaïs, of

Echo, of Héloïse, of Blanche, of Bertha with the long feet, of Alix. What has become of them all?

"But where are the snows of yester-year?"

Such is the refrain of the first ballad.

In the second he takes up the men. Where are now, he asks, Pope Calixtus, Alphonso, King of Arragon, Arthur, King of Brittany, Lancelot and Charles VII, and Duguesclin, the stout Breton?

"But where is the brave Charlemagne?"

is the sad answer he makes to his own question.

In the third ballad, taking up the same thought, but in a broader way and as if to be done with everybody, he inquires what has become of the brave knights, the heralds, the trumpeters, the pursuivants. The refrain now is, —

"Carried away by the wind are they."

After this long enumeration, he comes to the conclusion that he may as well die, poor devil that he is: —

"Who, owning neither dish nor plate,
Never had even a parsley sprig:
. . . . .
Since popes, and kings, and sons of kings,
And those conceived in royal wombs,
Now cold and dead are laid in earth."

Nevertheless, the thought of death worries him, and later on he returns to the subject and writes the fine meditation which I shall now transcribe. The scene is laid in the charnel house of the monastery of the Innocents. He has just ironically bequeathed his great spectacles to the inmates of the Blind Asylum so that they may separate in the cemetery the honest and the dishonest people: —

"Here nor laugh nor play is seen.
Of what avail they once had wealth,
And once did lie in great state beds,
Or wine drank deep, their paunches filling,
Or their gay life of song and dance
Ready to lead at any time?
Their pleasures sweet all fail them now,
And sin alone of them remains.

"When I behold those skulls all bare,
Heaped up within this charnel house,
Masters of requests were they all,
Or household comptrollers at the least;
Or market-commissioners one and all:
The one or other I may them call,
For be they bishops or linkmen low,
Naught can I tell of their former lot.

"And those who in this mortal life
One for another quick friendship felt;
Of these some at one time ruled,
And feared and served by others were.

Behold them now content alike,
As in a heap they pell-mell lie.
Lordships no more do they now own :
No one is clerk or master there.

"Now they are dead, God rest their souls!
As for their bodies, they rotted are.
Whether were lords or noble dames,
Whether tenderly and softly fed
On cream, on porridge and on rice,
Their bones to dust have all returned,
And heedless are of play and strife —
May gentle Jesus them absolve ! "

Along with the thought of death, there is another which haunts and torments Villon : What becomes of prostitutes when they grow old ? The prostitute troubles him considerably ; one can see that she has filled a large place in his life. He knows her thoroughly, understands her and describes her in every aspect, speaks of her sometimes with love and commiseration, sometimes with hatred and insult, but never with indifference. He cannot be cold in the presence of so important a subject. He gets excited, he becomes enthusiastic for or against her ; he covers her with mud or with tears, he excuses her, he explains her, says how she has got to be what she is ; and the story is the same as that which Alfred de

Musset makes Monna Belcolore begin and Julia finish :—

"Honest they were, in very sooth,
Without reproach or blame in aught.
Though 't is true that at the first
Of these maids each and every one
Took, ere dishonour to her came,
A clerk, a monk, or a layman each
To quench the flame of love that burned
Hotter than did Saint Anthon's fire.

"So did, according to decree,
Their friends, as plain it doth appear;
They loved within a secret place,
For none but they did share that love.
Natheless, such love will pass away:
For she who did but one man love,
Parted from him and kept away,
Preferring much to love each one."

Four hundred years before Alexander Dumas, he almost literally discovered the poor weak woman. I know nothing finer in any poet's work than the regrets of the beautiful Heaulmière, that is, of the beauty who was Heaulmière, to use his own expression. The scene is admirably described. Three or four old, blear-eyed, wrinkled women are seated on their heels in an evil-looking den, under the projecting mantel of a great chimney, up which ascends in spirals

a thin wisp of bluish smoke issuing from a heap of thatch, — for wood is a thing unknown in such a house, where the window-panes are made of cobwebs. Heaulmière, who was lovely and lustful in the days of her youth, mourns and regrets what can no longer return ; the other old women, formerly prostitutes like herself, acquiesce in what she says with shaking head.

" Methinks I hear the sad complaint
Of the fair one that vended helms,
Wishing she might be a girl again,
And in this manner plaining :
Ah ! wicked age, ah ! age so harsh,
Why hast thou me so soon struck down ?
What stays my hand ? Why strike I not ?
And with one blow destroy my life ?

" From me you 've taken th' exalted sway
Which beauty had on me bestowed,
O'er clerk and trader and priest alway ;
For in those days was no man born
That all his goods would not have given me,
However later repent he might —
Provided I to him did give
What prudes ill-bred would him refuse.

" Yet many a man did I refuse —
Not very wise therein was I —
For love of a youth of clever mind,
To whom myself I freely gave ;

And whomsoever I deceived,
By my soul's weal I loved him well!
Yet harshly did he with me deal,
And loved me only for my gold.

"Yet could he not so treat me ill,
Or kick me sore, but I loved him still;
And though he dragged me on my back,
If only bade me then him kiss,
I all my pains at once forgot.
The glutton, soiled with sin,
Embraced me then — No profit hence,
For naught is left but sin and shame.

"He died — 't is thirty years and more,
And hoary headed, old, I yet survive.
Alas! when good old days I now recall,
What once I was, what now I am;
When I behold myself undressed and nude,
And see I am so greatly changed,
Poor and meagre, dried up, wizened,
I could cry out for very wrath.

"Where have gone my shining brow,
My hair so fine, my eyebrows arched,
The broad 'tween eyes, the radiant glance,
With which the cleverest I did catch?
My fine straight nose, nor large nor small,
My pretty ears so closely set,
My well mark'd chin, my clear sweet face,
And my beauteous crimson lips?

"My shapely shoulders fair,
My two long arms and handsome hands;
My twin small breasts, and well-fleshed hips
High and shapely, and right fit
To play the game of love's debate?
My strong loins and the daintiness
Between broad, firm thighs set,
Within its pretty garden-close?

"Wrinkled the brow, and gray the hair;
Fallen the brows and dulled the eyes
That flashed so many a glance and smile,
Catching so many a trader then.
Hooked nose, of beauty shorn,
Ears that hang and hairy are;
Ghastly faced, pallid and wan,
With sunken chin and puffèd lips.

"Such the end of human beauty,
Arms grow short and hands contract,
Shoulders bowed and humped become.
As for breasts, they wither up,
And the hips are like the head.
As for dainty, fie upon it!
And the thighs, all withered up
And blotched all over like sausage skin.

"So the good times we regret,
Poor old hags together sitting,
Crouching low, on our heels resting,
By the mean little hempen fire —
Soon it flames, and soon goes out!
And yet of yore we were delicate!
Such is the fate of many a one."

This piece, one of the finest ever written by the poet, shows how varied are the colours on his palette. It is impossible to depict youth with more youthful and fresher tints. The whole of the first part is so carefully and accurately drawn that it would do honour to a more modern painter. There is nothing in it of Gothic stiffness; it is lovingly executed and full of charming details, the artlessness, the occasional crudity of which I beg the reader to excuse. It is a cut-purse who makes a prostitute talk; it would be a mistake to ask for too much chastity in such a subject treated by such an author. To cut these things out would have been wicked. Certain things objectionable in themselves cease to be so in a style which has to be laboriously studied out and which may in some respects be considered as a dead language. Nudities in old paintings are in no wise reprehensible, and awaken no evil thoughts; they are a part of art and nothing else; and I shall always consider as stupid vandalism the act of mistaken piety which caused to be broken the stained-glass window representing Saint Mary the Egyptian offering to the boatman, in payment for her passage, the use of her beautiful body.

The second part, which is antithetical to the first, is no less remarkable. The poet takes pleasure in deforming the face he has created; he digs out the eyes, he plucks out the eyebrows, he scores the forehead, he changes the golden hair into silver hair, pulls the nose down to the mouth and pulls the chin up to the nose. The beautiful and blooming lips that were crimson as roses, are now only withered and wrinkled skin; the long white arms which voluptuously unfolded to attract their prey are shortened and drawn up, as are the shoulders; the fair, firm, polished thighs which he has described so complacently are now fleshless and marked with red stains. The charming young girl is now but a spectre, an old woman, a regular broomstick witch. He casts away all the perfections he has created and tramples on them with ghoulish delight. It seems as if he took this way of avenging himself on the little Macée of Orléans, who took his belt, as he says, and who is a very bad lot, on Catherine de Vaucelles, on Jeanneton, on Marion the Idol, and other creatures of the same kidney, to whom, it would appear, he had no great reason to be grateful.

What think you follows this terrible attack — advice to return to virtue or something of the sort? Not at

all. Precepts on how to fleece a man and to turn one's youth to account.

> "For value there is none in a woman old,
> She 's naught but coin that is refused."

True, it would be time and trouble lost to preach to Blanche la Savatière, to Guillemette, to Catherine and Jeanneton; it would be casting one's moralities before prostitutes.

> "If for money alone they love,
> They are loved but for an hour.
> Liberally all men they love,
> And broadly smile when purses gape."

Human nature is ever the same, whatever dabblers in local colour may say; and these lines written for lustful girls in 1461 would be very applicable to-day. The practice has not varied.

> "Soon your windows closed must be
> When wrinkled hags you all become,
> . . . . . .
> Girls their bosoms freely showing
> That many men they may attract."

That was just the way the sirens used to do.

Villon, a drunkard, a gross eater, a thief, would have been incomplete had he not been the knight of

some street Aspasia; he was so, and in the "Great Testament" he has included a ballad which he dedicates to big Margot, the Helen whose Paris he was. It is impossible for me to transcribe this ballad, for the cant and the decency of the modern French tongue will have none of the liberties and the free and easy ways of its old Gallic sister. It is a great pity, for never was a bolder picture traced by a bolder hand. The touch is firm and marked, the drawing clean and warm; there is no exaggeration or wrong colouring; the word expresses the thing itself, it is a literal translation; hideous lasciviousness cannot be carried farther. It is nauseating. The attitude of big Margot, her gestures, her words, are thoroughly those of a prostitute. She utters two words: one is an oath, by the death of Christ; the other an expression of ignoble tenderness, fit to disgust you with women for a fortnight. This big, blowsy, paunchy prostitute, whose colour is brighter than rouge, that ribald wench filled full of meat and wine, drunk and half undressed, mad, howling, and shouting, mingling her filthy caresses with kisses that stink of wine, and dangerous hiccoughs, is painted in masterly fashion with three or four strokes of the brush. Have you seen any of the libertine etchings of

Rembrandt, — Bathsheba, Susannah, or especially Potiphar, — a marvellous mingling of the fantastic and the real? They are admirable yet disgusting things. Their nudity is cruel; the forms are monstrously true, and though abominable, resemble so much the most delicate forms of the most charming women that they make you blush in spite of yourself. It is a peculiarity of the masters that they know how to conceal a secret beauty within the most hideous creations. Well, if you have ever seen one of those etchings, you can form a most accurate idea of the figure drawn by Villon. The background, though scarcely indicated and half in shadow, can easily be guessed: a ceiling crossed by smoky rafters, an oak table and a broken coffer, a serge bedstead of a filthy green, worn by long and frequent service — the whole of the very scanty furniture of the prostitute. Through the half-open door are seen coming the clerics and the laymen, the citizens and the soldiers whom lust drives into this abominable den. At the back, our poet with his sarcastic look, pitcher in hand, who hurries down to the cellar and offers bread and cheese to the new-comers, ready to thrash them in fine fashion if they refuse to pay their bill, and advising them to return if they are satis-

fied. In the foreground the divinity of the temple, rouged, dressed up, beribboned, and laden with sham jewellery, in the full dress of her profession: a Teniers in the very best style of the master; which Mathurin, the great poet, did not disdain, which he restored, retouched, and framed in his magnificent alexandrines; which reaches to Ronsard on the one hand and on the other to Corneille. What sanctifies this impure picture are the last two sombre, desperate verses, which are, as it were, the finishing touch to the picture: —

> "Filthy we are, and filth follows us,
> We fly from honour, and it flies from us."

The poor scholar Villon did not have much luck in love, if we are to believe him, and he may surely be believed, for men are braggarts in such matters. Nor is it very surprising. He had no money in his purse — supposing he had one; he was anything but good-looking, thin and dried up like a man hanged in summer, of a complexion as dark as a blackberry or a broom used to sweep out an oven; he had no more hair, beard or eyebrows than a peeled turnip, — that is his own expression. Although he was scarce twenty, he looked old; for he was worn threadbare by all sorts of excesses and privations. All this did not

make up a very pleasant youth, so his lamentations are comical. He calls himself a martyr to love; he composes a second epitaph for himself, in which he pretends he has been slain by one of Cupid's darts. Jeanneton turns him out, Catherine de Vaucelles has him beaten as unmercifully as if he were linen washed at the riverside; he is deceived, robbed in every fashion; he is made to believe that bladders are lanterns; he is a dupe, he who dupes everybody, — so true it is that love makes everybody foolish, as he says in one of his ballads, in which he endeavours, according to his custom, to console himself by recalling a greater than he, Solomon, to wit, who turned idolator for love, Samson, who lost his clear-sightedness, Orpheus, the gentle minstrel, Narcissus the handsome, and Sardina, the brave knight (you would never guess that he means Sardanapalus), David the wise prophet, and Herod, and so many more. "This is not nonsense," he adds with most charming and artless self-possession; "blessed is he who has nothing to do with it."

Villon, as he appears to us in his work, is the most complete incarnation of the people of that time. He seems to have suggested to Rabelais the delightful character of Panurge. And is there not, indeed, a very

great likeness between Panurge and Villon the scholar? — Panurge, with his nose like a razor handle, Panurge the poltroon, the guzzler, the boaster, the street-walker, with his twenty-six pockets full of pincers, hooks, and scissors wherewith to cut purses, and many another evil instrument; Panurge, about as gross as he could be, not a bad fellow in his own way, save that he is somewhat libidinous and constantly subject to the disease called lack of funds, in spite of his sixty-three ways of obtaining them; Panurge who is impious and superstitious, and who really fears naught save blows and danger; and Villon, with his gipsy complexion, his long, dry, clutching hands, his ragged coat frayed and fringed, and shabby as that of an apple gatherer in Perche; Villon in ecstasy before the rich soups of the Jacobins; Villon frequenting houses of ill-fame while passing as a suffering lover; Villon, invoking at every line God and the Blessed Virgin and all the saints in the calendar, and never letting pass a single opportunity of turning into ridicule priests and monks, whatever their gown and whatever their colour. Both thoroughly hated the citizens and the watch, — in other words, proprietors and the guardians of property. They are two sorts of eclectic philosophers, who seize upon

their own wherever they find it. And then, both ever suffering from an empty purse; for if they have sixty-three ways of getting money, they have two hundred and ten of spending it; having constantly recourse to expedients, being constantly within a hair's-breadth of the gibbet and avoiding hanging only by dint of wit and genius. Complete as is Panurge, Villon nevertheless is still more complete; there is in him a melancholy strain lacking in the other. He feels his wretchedness; something human still abides within his breast, — he loves his mother. Panurge seems to have fallen from heaven and to proceed from nothing at all. The thought that he has a father and a mother never occurs to us; he is probably the fruit of the loves of a ham and a bottle, or he grew up between the paving-stones like a mushroom at the door of some lupanar. His sarcasm is pitiless, his laughter is never tempered by tears. Nor has he his prototype's loving respect for woman's beauty; his lust is filthier, and has something monkish about it; it is the lust of a satyr rather than that of a man; he sees nothing beyond physical enjoyment, the ideal love is unknown to him. He would not have found such a line as Villon's —

"Two were we, with but one heart."

Panurge, rejected, has the woman who has repelled him filthied by dogs; Villon breathes this elegy: —

> "The days will come that shall wither up,
> Turn yellow and dry your beauty's bloom.
> I 'd laugh, if then young I could walk;
> But, alas! not so, and folly 't would be:
> Old shall I be; you, wan and ugly then.
> So now, drink deep, long as the brook doth run;
> Do not bring to all the grief,
> Without increasing it, a poor wretch to aid."

One would think that it was Béranger singing, —

> "Old age will come, oh, lovely mistress mine!"

The point of likeness between Villon and Deburau, that other admirable poet of the people, who does not like to hear the nightingale warble, is the singular contempt which he feels for pastoral nature. In his verses, so full of colour and in which there are charming picturesque details, you never get the least glimpse of a landscape. There is a ballad in which he explains at length this antipathy of his. It is a charming *genre* picture. A canon, fat as ecclesiastics like him are, and who does not give the lie to the proverb, is seated, or rather is lying, upon a soft eider-down in a well closed-in and well carpeted room. The fire burns

bright, well up into the chimney. By his side is lying his housekeeper, Mistress Sydoine, white, dulcet, soft-skinned, rosy-cheeked. Flagons and cups full of hippocras are placed on the table. The joyous couple cast away the clothes that inconvenience them, laugh, play, kiss, and fondle each other. The poet, thin, starving, shivering with cold, looks at them from outside through a mortise hole, and envying their happiness exclaims piteously, —

> "Then did I know that grief to assuage,
> Naught is so sure as to live at ease.
>
> "Had Franc-Gontier and Helen his mate,
> That pleasant life tasted and known,
> Onions and garlic that make strong breath,
> They ne'er would have touched, nor burned brown crust,
> Their curds or their porridge,
> And never for garlic cared — this I say in all good grace.
> If under the rosebush they boast they lay,
> Which is the best? A bed and chairs.
> Which think you? Need one long muse?
> Naught is so sweet as to live at ease."

Unquestionably Villon did not care much for the ideal; but putting him aside, there are enough of the Gothic writers who have given us descriptions of the country. On the other hand, he initiates us into the whole of the home life of the Middle Ages; he is

as interesting to the erudite as to the poet; he makes us acquainted with numberless fashions and manners that are to be met with nowhere else; he takes us shamelessly everywhere, into lupanars, taverns, tennis courts, restaurants, hovels, and dens of all kinds; he describes the hostess and the sign; he does not spare us the least detail. The company is a curious mixture. All are thieves, scoundrels, prostitutes, procuresses, fences, and other worthy professions. The men are René de Montigny, Colin de Cayeux, thieves, and bosom friends of the poet, who were strung up; Michault Culdoue, Brother Beaude, and others, who deserved to share the same fate; Fremin, the little cleric, who will certainly be hanged, for with such a professor as Villon he cannot end otherwise; Master Jehan Cotard, the jolly drunkard who bumps up against the butchers' stalls. And among the women we have Maschecroue, Marion Peautarde, Marion the Idol, Blanche, Rose, Margot, mistresses of Villon; little Macée of Orléans, who corrupted him; Catherine de Vaucelles, who had him beaten, Ysabeau and Guillemette, Denise, and a score of others, for our poet had more than one acquaintance among this class of people. All of them swarm and stir, live, get drunk, make love, and rob passers-by,

and are reproduced with the most marvellous power. Villon needs but a word, a touch, to draw a personage; he hits on the distinctive character with singular sagacity. He reconstructs completely a man by means of a single word, of an epithet. The attitudes of his figures are indicated in a clean, sharp way which recalls Albert Dürer. What think you of this group?—

"Look at these two or three seated on the hem of their skirts in chapel or church."

or of this one? —

"Hoods well down upon their heads; thumbs within their girdles stuck . . . saying, Hey? What?"

Among all these abandoned women a single woman's figure appears pure and spotless, — it is his mother. The bequest he makes to her is most graceful and poetic; it is a ballad to the Virgin.

I

"Lady of Heaven, and of Earth the Queen,
Empress of the Infernal Swamps,
Receive me your most Christian one,
And of your elect let me be.
Although I never aught was worth,
Your grace, O Lady, Mistress mine,
Is greater yet than all my sins.

Without that grace may soul not die,
Nor Heaven reach — I tell no lie,
And in that faith I 'll live and die.

II

" To your Son tell that I am His,
And let Him all my sins forgive.
As Magdalen may He pardon me,
And as Theophilus pardoned He,
Who through your grace absolvèd was,
Although to Satan himself had pledged.
Preserve me from ever doing that,
O Virgin! that whole still bear
The Sacrament adored at mass.
And in this faith I 'll live and die.

III

" A woman I, both poor and old,
Unlearned too, who letters never knew ;
Upon the walls of parish church
The Paradise I painted see, with harps and lutes,
And Hell, wherein the damnèd boil.
The one I dread, the other joys, delights.
Be mine the joy, O Goddess great,
To whom we sinners have recourse,
In faith, without deceit or sloth.
And in this faith I live and die."

That last stanza is delightful. It is like one of those old paintings on a gold background by Giotto or Cimabue. The outline is simple and artless, some-

what hard, like primitive things; the tones are bright but not crude, although the gradations are lacking in several places. It is true Catholic poetry, the poetry of a sincere believer, such as a greater poet could not write now. Amid the whole company of ballads its sisters, which are either fantastic or libertine or vile, this one blooms pure and white, like a lily in the centre of a mudhole. It shows that Villon could have done other work than he has done had he been lucky enough to meet with an Alexander as did the pirate Diomedes. But such fortune never came to him, and fate was too strong for him; in spite of his good intentions, he had to tread to the end the road on which he had entered. He died, no one knows where, poor, no doubt, as he had lived, —

"Now my body I give and bequeath to our common mother, Earth. Not very fat will the worms find it, for too hard a war has hunger waged. Pray God it may be delivered soon; from dust it came, to dust returns. All things, if they stray not far, gladly to their place return."

Ring out the belfry bells with double swing, ye ringers! Four loaves shall you have. Come hither, sham pilgrims debauching at Ruel, sham invalids, sham epileptics, idiots, cut-purses, thieves, Bohemians, gipsies,

Zingari, vagabonds, evil youths, matrons, lustful girls, child-stealers, fortune-tellers, witches, and procuresses; come away from the Court of Miracles to the chapel of Saint-Avoye to hear the service, and to follow the bier; for the master of you all, Villon the scholar, is dead, — of love, he says; of hunger, I believe.

Théophile de Viau

II

THÉOPHILE DE VIAU

IT is of a truly great poet that we are going to speak this time. He died young, was persecuted his life long, and he was ignored after death. His unlucky fate was fulfilled indeed; he himself says that he was born under an unlucky star. He would be completely forgotten but for two ridiculous lines of Nicolas Boileau in his "Art of Poetry:"

> "To Malherbe, to Racine, they prefer Théophile,
> And the spangles of Tasso to gold of Virgil;"

and but for a wretched conceit drawn from his tragedy of "Pyramus and Thisbe": —

> "This the dagger which with the blood of its master
> Has foully stained itself. It blushes, the traitor!" —

lines quoted in all treatises on rhetoric as an abnormal example of bad taste, but which do not prevent de Viau from being a poet in the widest sense of the term and from having written one of the lines most praised in Delille's work, —

> "He hears but silence, sees naught but shade,"

and many more, which luckier men than he have profited by; among others that very Nicolas Boileau who speaks of him in such disdainful fashion. It is true that he mentions de Viau along with Tasso, and that is an insult which one might well envy.

Before I had read even a single line of his, I already felt a tender interest in him on account of his name, Théophile, which is mine, as you are aware — or perhaps you are not aware. It was absurd, perhaps, but I confess that all the harm that was said of Théophile de Viau seemed to me to be addressed to myself, Théophile Gautier. I would willingly have thrashed that pedant Boileau for the harsh lines in which he insults my poor namesake, and cast to the flames the treatise on rhetoric which contains the impertinent quotation. Never have I felt more deeply criticisms addressed to me personally. Forgive this foolish piece of pride, but it did not appear to me possible that a man bearing my name should be such a wretched poet as it was maintained that de Viau had been. There is nothing striking about the name Théophile, and perhaps I am myself a proof that it may be borne and the bearer write very bad verse; but I have heard that obscure name spoken so softly by such gentle voices that I

love it as my own, and love it in others, and would not change it for your name William, old Shakespeare, nor for your Noel, O handsome Gordon Byron.

It became necessary for the repose of my mind to confirm my entirely gratuitous supposition that Théophile de Viau was in fact as good a poet as I, Théophile Gautier. A rapid reading of his works was more than sufficient to convince me of this fact, and I believe that this article, with a few quotations taken here and there at haphazard, will make you share my opinion, however great admirers of Boileau you may be.

The question comes home to me and is almost a family affair, so I shall give you no rest until you have bent the knee before my idol. I tolerate very willingly any sort of a religion, but I am most fanatically intolerant as regards Théophile, and if you do not believe in him as I do, I cannot see how you are going to be saved. Now, was it not a splendid idea in Théophile's godmother to give him that name and not another one? It is quite certain that if she had bestowed upon him the appellation Christopher or Bartholomew I should not have troubled about him in the slightest, which would have been a great misfortune for him, to begin with, for you, and for me also.

On the titlepage of his works Théophile gives only his Christian name, I know not why. His family name was de Viau, and not Viaud as it is commonly written. A passage from his apology written by himself testifies to this, and Father Garasse, his sworn foe, plays on this name with his usual amenity, and by a change worthy of a scholar and a theologian of the sixteenth century he calls him *veau* (calf).

Théophile de Viau was born in 1620 at Boussière-Sainte-Radegonde, a small village in Agenois, on the left bank of the river Lot, some distance above Aiguillon and about a mile and a half from Port Sainte-Marie, as we learn from several passages in his works and from a very eulogious poem, probably composed by Scudéry, printed at the beginning of the volume. The biographers and annotators who have said that he was born at Clérac were in error. It has been claimed that he was a tavern-keeper's son. That is an illustration of the devilish animosity entertained for him, for his family was well known, and nothing was easier than to prove the absurdity of such a statement; but Father Garasse did not stick at such trifles. Théophile's ancestor had been secretary to the Queen of Navarre; Henry IV had appointed his uncle governor

of Touraine as a recompense for his loyal services, and his father, having practised at the bar at Bordeaux, had withdrawn to Boussière on account of the civil wars, fearing to be disturbed because he was a Protestant.

> "There stands a mansion small,
> At the foot of a great hill."

A tower built by the poet's ancestors draws attention to the manor from quite a distance, rising as it does above the humbler middle-class houses grouped around it. The landscape has a most romantic aspect. On the hill the soil is rather poor and rocky, but it produces an excellent claret, and one can live there very comfortably. Below, the meadows are green and rich, the woods well foliaged and shady. Boussière is a perfect little terrestrial paradise, if we are to believe literally the poetic descriptions of it which Théophile wrote in his dungeon. For many months and many years of his short, well filled life were spent in prison, and the window of a cell forms an admirable frame for a landscape. Everything appears much more charming when one is away from it, and pictures seen in the camera obscura of memory stand out with more vigour. In a passage which we reserve the right to cite he speaks of his hereditary patrimony and tells us that he

had a steward called Belgarde. There is nothing about this which smacks of the tavern. A house large enough to have a steward is not usually turned into an inn. Besides, Théophile in his apology, written in Latin, — for he wrote at least as well in that tongue as in French, — speaks plainly on this point : —

"*Eam domum quam tu cauponam vocas, aulici plures, atque ii qui melioris notæ dignitatis sunt, invisere et pro tenui nostro proventu aliquot dies frugaliter excepti, saltem immunes abiere.*"

"The house which you call a tavern, several courtiers of the highest nobility have not disdained to visit ; and having been frugally treated, owing to our modest income, for a number of days, they at least went away without having to pay anything."

"*Rem novam, O Garasse, filius cauponis in celeberrima Galliarum regis aula annos ultra tredecim nutritus, tot nobilium familiaritate notus !*"

"A tavern-keeper's son for more than thirteen years at the court of a king of France, and publicly honoured by the intimacy of so many great personages, would be a novelty, O Garassus ! "

In this retreat of Boussière Théophile's father gave himself up wholly to the study of literature, and he probably gave his son his first lessons, for it would

appear from the letter to Balzac that he had not received any regular education: "My teachers have been Scottish scholars only, and yours Jesuit doctors." This did not prevent his being a very learned and excellent poet. A passage of the "Curious Doctrine" tells us that he studied philosophy at Saumur.

He came to Paris in 1610. He was then twenty years old, but if we are to believe a portrait which illustrates the last edition of his works, he was anything but good-looking. The portrait represents him with an antique pallium over his shoulder and a laurel wreath around his head, producing a singular contrast with his curled-up moustaches and his beard cut in the most recent fashion. He has a bony, thin face, much seamed in every direction, and a very prominent brow; eyes not very large, but very brilliant; a somewhat large nose, though aquiline; the lower lip very full and projecting disdainfully, — the face of a man who has lived and suffered, who has thought and acted, who has lacked everything and gone to excess in everything; the face of a poet who has lived, in a word, which unfortunately is almost too rare among poets. The portrait is further confirmed by these words of Théophile's: "Nature and fortune

have not given me many pleasant parts;" but his natural qualities, his subtile and ready mind more than compensated for the absence of physical charms, and he was none the less welcome in the best of company and sought out by the young nobles who piqued themselves on having a taste for poetry. And indeed, it would be difficult to have a more fortunate poetic temperament than had Théophile. He is passionately fond, not of virtuous men and beautiful women only, but also of every beautiful thing. He loves a fine day, limpid streams, mountain prospects, far-stretching plains, rich forests, the shores of the sea, its storms and its calms; he loves all that more particularly appeals to the senses: music, flowers, handsome clothes, hunting, fine horses, perfumes, good cheer. He is of an easy and sympathetic disposition, ready to grow hot about anything and everything; a perfect, many-faceted piece of crystal which reflects in each of its tints a different picture enlivened and enriched with all the colours of Iris; and I really do not understand why his name should be so perfectly forgotten, while that of Malherbe, the sworn sorter-out of diphthongs, is everywhere honourably cited. But as we have already said, Théophile

was born under the most unlucky star, and prudent men have ever proved victorious over bold men. This explains how Malherbe, the grammarian, has eclipsed Théophile, the poet.

About this time Théophile formed a friendship with Balzac, the letter-writer, a friendship sufficiently close to give rise to absurd gossip, the sure resource of the evil-tempered who have nothing to say. They travelled together to Holland, but quarrelled at the end of their trip. The cause of their rupture is not known accurately. A contemporary writer, Father Goulu, the general of the reformed Cistercians, in his "Letters of Phylarchus," merely says that Balzac played a trick upon Théophile. The latter darkly hints at several rather shady acts on the part of Balzac. He reproaches him with being envious, proud, servile, crotchety, of uneven temper, and a plagiarist.

"Your face," he says, "and your naturally unpleasant disposition have retained something of your original poverty and the vice which usually accompanies it. I do not speak of your stealing from authors; the son-in-law of Dr. Baudius accuses you of a much worse theft. On this point I would rather be somewhat obscure than vindictive. If anything of

the sort had turned up in my case you would have been the death of me, and you would never have felt the terror which my deliverance causes you. I expected while in captivity that you would have some recollection of the obligations you are under to me since our trip, but I find that you have tried to harm me as much as you ought to have served me, and that you hate me because you offended me. Had you been honest enough to excuse yourself, I was generous enough to forgive you. I am kind and obliging, you are cowardly and sly, and I think you will always follow your inclination and not mine. I do not repent having formerly drawn my sword to avenge a thrashing you received. It was not my fault that your affront was not avenged. It was then, perhaps, that you thought I was not a good poet because you saw I was a very good soldier. I do not bring this forward to acquire military glory or to reproach you in the least for your poltroonery, but to show you that you ought to have been silent as to my faults, since I had always concealed yours. I am neither a poet nor an orator, I have no knowledge of the art ; I speak simply, and merely know how to write decently. What brings me both friendship and envy is merely my easy habits and incorruptible faithfulness, and my open profession to love men who are neither rascals nor cowards; and here it is that you and I prove to be unsuited to each other. Having formerly promised me a friendship which I thoroughly deserved, your disposition must have changed very greatly to lead you to insult me in my person, and to strive with my

enemies as to which of you would most outrage me in my affliction."

Balzac did not reply to this terrible letter, and that silence proves that he must have been greatly in the wrong since he allowed himself to be treated so savagely after having been the aggressor and brought up an old quarrel long since forgotten. Besides, Balzac's attack is vague and full of declamation, and his conduct is inexcusable, while it must not be forgotten that, at the moment, Théophile was imprisoned in the Conciergerie, charged with a crime punishable by death, in the same cell in which the regicide Ravaillac had been placed.

On his return from Holland he composed for the court festivals ballads, challenges, mottoes, and masquerades, which gained him much praise, such as "Apollo, Champion," "The Prince of Cyprus," "The Sailors," and other allegories in the taste of the day. These compositions are full of conceits after the Italian manner, and of excessive striving after ingenious ideas, but they are at least as well written and as clever as the best that Benserade and Bois-Robert have left. In "Apollo, Champion" occur these beautiful lines: —

"I give out the heat that gives life to roses
And brings back to life the buried fruits;
I bestow colour and duration on things,
And the splendour of fair lilies is due to me.
When I depart a mantle of darkness
Covers heaven and earth with a horror cold.
. . . . . .
The loveliest orchards are melancholy sights,
For when my eyes are closed, the world is dead."

Théophile indulged to excess the remarkable facility which he possessed, for it is natural to man to go to extremes in everything, even in his qualities. A number of his impromptus have been preserved, for he wrote impromptus and very charming ones. One day, when he was shown a small equestrian statue of Henry IV, he smiled and stroking the crupper of the horse, he recited the following quatrain: —

"Small, pretty, gentle horse,
Easy to mount and dismount alike,
Though you are not a new Bucephalus,
You bear a greater than Alexander,"

which is certainly one of the most successful impromptus known.

About this time he wrote his tragedy of "Pasiphaë," never performed, so far as I know, and not included in his collected works, but printed separately in 1631,

a few years after his death. In the introduction to this play, which has now become extremely scarce, it is said, —

"Many persons are of opinion that this poem is in the style of the late Théophile. One of his most intimate friends assured me that it is, and stated that Théophile composed it when he was first at court. Trusting to this information, I have believed the fact to be as stated. The opinion which several excellent persons have expressed of this work has induced me to publish it as Théophile's, in order that it may survive its author."

This play, with "Pyramus and Thisbe," forms the entire dramatic production of Théophile, who, to tell the truth, was not well fitted for play-writing, thanks to the fantastical and erratic turn of his mind. He did not deceive himself on this point, and explains the reason with remarkable sagacity: —

"Formerly, when I wrote for the stage, the rules I was constrained to observe gave me much trouble, and I was long a martyr to that unpleasant sort of work; but at last, the gods be praised, I have given it up. Few have adventured on so long a voyage without being wrecked and losing their way. One needs, to succeed, to be miraculously wise and foolish at one and the same time, to unite memory and judgment, to

invent freely, and to constantly draw verse in the same vein from a full spring of expression. I propose to write verse which shall not be constrained; to let my mind wander in lighter designs; to seek some place where nothing shall displease me; to meditate at leisure; to dream as I please; to pass whole hours in looking at myself in springs; to listen as in a dream to the babble of the brooks; to write in the woods; to break off, to be silent, to compose a quatrain without thinking of what I am doing."

These remarks are as poetic as they are accurate, — for the stage absolutely excludes fantasy. Extraordinary ideas stand out too boldly, and the footlights light up too vividly the frail creatures of imagination. The pages of a book are more complaisant, the impalpable phantom of the idea rises slowly before the reader, who beholds it only with the eyes of the mind. On the stage the idea becomes material and palpable in the person of the actor; the idea puts on powder and rouge, wears a wig, corks its eyebrows to make them blacker, stands on its heels near the prompter's box, listening and swelling its voice. It is so ridiculous that I am amazed that people do not burst out laughing at the very first scene of a tragedy. It takes long habit to bear with such a spectacle. So whatever differs in the least from a certain number of conven-

tional situations and speeches strikes one as strange and abnormal; hence innovations on the stage are more difficult and more dangerous than anywhere else; a novel scene almost always insures the failure of a play, while there is no instance of a commonplace situation having prevented success. In every literary renovation the drama is always the last form touched upon. The ode leads the procession, giving its hand to the poem, its younger brother; then comes the novel. The drama drags itself unsteadily, *non pedibus æquis*, some distance behind the latter, which turns around occasionally to see if it is following, and which stops to wait for it if it is too far away. The ode is the commencement of everything; it is thought. Drama is the end of everything; it is action. The one is mind, the other matter. The ode is music without a libretto; the poem is music with a libretto; the novel is the libretto alone, and the drama is the materialisation of the libretto with the help of painted canvas, costumes, and footlights. It is only when a society grows old that it acquires a drama. In its decrepitude, when it cannot bear with even the small amount of ideas which the drama contains, it turns to the circus; after the

play-actors come the gladiators, after the ranting of Melpomene the roar of wild beasts; for very extreme civilisation substitutes matter for spirit, and the thing for the idea. In the early days of the drama Theramenes came on mournfully to narrate the death of Hippolytus; to-day Hippolytus would die on the stage. Ere long a real wild-beast will really devour an unfortunate hero for the sake of greater realism and the greater satisfaction of the public.

Like all highly wrought natures, Théophile gave himself up to the pursuit of pleasure with an ardour which was no doubt excusable, but which caused him much sorrow later on. Not that I believe everything that has been said about him; I am of opinion that he was imprudent as much as anything else; that on the whole he was neither better nor worse, so far as morals go, than the young courtiers he frequented, and that he led the same sort of life led by all poets of the day who were received in the houses of great lords. As for his verse, at least that which he acknowledged and signed, it is certainly as chaste, if not more so, as the chastest verse of the chastest poet of that day. He loved good living, he says so himself; but that is not a sufficient reason for banishing a man

from the realm, still less for burning him in effigy. He speaks on this matter with noble frankness: —

"I care more deeply for study and good living than for anything else. Books have sometimes tired me but they have never dazed me, and wine has often cheered but never intoxicated me. Indulgence in wine and women was nearly fatal to me on leaving school, for my somewhat impulsive nature had got beyond the rule of my teachers at a time when my morals still needed discipline. My companions were older than I, but did not enjoy so much freedom. The liberty which I enjoyed after the discipline of the schools was very dangerous to my soul. I was about to plunge into vice, which offered itself favourably enough to my young fancy, but the crosses of my lot turned my inclination elsewhere, and the ups and downs of my life did not give voluptuousness time to destroy me. Since then, little by little, my most libertine desires have died down as my blood grew cooler, and their violence diminishing every day with advancing age, I may hope henceforth for assured tranquillity. I am no longer so fond of banquets and dances, and indulge in the most secret voluptuousness with much restraint." ("Fragment," chap. ii.)

"As for the licentiousness of life which you desire to charge with the corruption of youth, I swear to you that, since I have been at court and have lived in Paris, I have known no youths that were not more corrupt than I, and that having discovered their vice, I did not long keep com-

pany with them. I am not bound to instruct them save by my example ; those who have charge of them are answerable for their debaucheries, and not I who am neither tutor nor schoolmaster to any one."

His liberty and freedom of speech gained him numerous and powerful enemies. Besides, he was a Calvinist, and did not speak with due respect of the Jesuits. At the court of a bigoted king like Louis XIII this fact was sufficient to involve disfavour, so an order was obtained from the king, obliging Théophile to leave the kingdom within the least possible time, — an order brought to him in the month of May, 1619, by the captain of the watch.

He went to London and sought to be presented to King James I, but it seems that the latter, prejudiced against the poet, would not allow it. To console himself Théophile wrote the following : —

"If James, the learned King, would not see me, it was because, delighted with my wit, he thought me a spirit and consequently invisible."

The ode which he addressed to King Louis XIII is perfect in rhythm and taste. It begins thus : —

"He Who hurls the thunderbolt, Who rules the elements, Who moves with mighty quaking the great globe of the uni-

verse, God, Who placed the sceptre in your hand and may from you remove it to-morrow; He Who lends you His light and, spite of your lilies, one day shall turn to dust your buried limbs; that great God Who opened the abysses in the centre of the universe and keeps them ever gaping for the punishment of crime, has willed that innocent man should find refuge under the shadow of His mighty wing. He will not be angered if you stay the deluge of ills wherein you have cast me. Far away from the banks of the Seine and the pleasant air of the court, it seems to me as though the sun shines but dimly now. Upon the dreadful summit of a rock, which even bears dare not approach, I consult the Furies, which ever seek to impel my importunate thoughts to make me dash myself down. Amid barbarians where I find none to whom I can speak, my sad accents are lost in the air and on the echoing shore. Instead of the splendour of Paris, where the people with loud acclaim bless the King as he passes by, I hear the croaking of crows, and the thunder in the clouds speaks to me only of the dead."

It recalls, does it not? Ovid exiled to Scythia. The country described by the poet seems to be Kamschatka or Scythia, rather than good old England, where stout is extra and beef more underdone than elsewhere; even John Bull in 1619 could not possibly look as glum as he is described. But in those days there was but one country in the world for a Frenchman, and that was

France; and it was Paris only that was the real France, — Paris and the court. The expression which Théophile uses is more accurate than seems at first sight, when he speaks of "the gentle air of the court." In truth, to the nobility the court was a peculiar country, a special climate created for it, an atmosphere out of which it could not live any more than fishes can live out of water. To see the King was more necessary to the courtier than to see the sun. His whole life was spent in watching for a glance from the sovereign; a remark from His Majesty delighted him. What does the King do? Where is the King? Does the King seem to be in a good or a bad temper? The time is drawing near when Louis XIV shall say with truth, "I am the State." All the nobles so busily, so eagerly buzzing around the throne, the courtiers who die of despair because they have been snubbed, who go crazy with delight because they have been smiled upon, are already vaguely and unconsciously feeling this great truth. Richelieu, who is about to appear, will strike with his blood-imbrued hands the last blow at the great trunk of feudalism. By destroying the high aristocracy the Cardinal-minister prepares the way for

the Revolution of 1793. After him there are no more great lords, great feudal barons fighting the King, and almost kings themselves on their own lands. "With his experienced hands he kills the lordships in their battlemented eyries." He completes the work begun by Louis XI, the sovereign who, next to him, the Cardinal-King (for Louis XIII was a mere figurehead), did most harm to monarchy while appearing to consolidate it.

There are no more great lords, there are courtiers only. The King stands alone, on a high pedestal, and, at the first glance, he appears great, but his very elevation and isolation make him the butt of all attacks; he is too high; there is a gulf between the people and himself. There is no class regal enough to be really royalist; the King's interests are no one else's interests, and no one will defend him against his people, not even the courtiers, who consider him merely as a distributor of pensions, and not as a man with whom they can make common cause.

The works of Théophile are full of regrets that he was so unfortunate as no longer to belong to the court, no longer to be admitted to the King's *coucher*, and, Heaven forgive me! he is more concerned about that

than about the risk of being burned alive. Not that our poet is servile, — his freedom of speech nearly cost him dear, — but he felt the influence of his time, an influence which the strongest minds can with difficulty resist. We have insisted on this point because the need of being patronised on the one hand, and of paying court on the other, is one of the characteristics of writers and poets, even down to a period not very distant from our own, but which, so different is it, seems separated from it by a full two thousand years. Kings and princes were the first patrons, then great lords and literary ladies, then farmers-general and operatic singers. It became just as necessary to have one's poet as to have a monkey or a china mandarin; so true is it that the human mind is essentially progressive.

Théophile, having been recalled to court, overflowed with joy and delight. He rimed a small poem, perfectly innocent in our opinion, but which struck the Reverend Father Garassus as monstrous: —

"I am very well, brother, and my muse is troubled by naught. I have lost my profane temper, I am admitted to the King's *coucher*, and Phoebus every day in my home has double mantles of plush. My soul braves fate. Every day

I feast. My room is about to be hung with tapestry. Every day to me is a Shrove-Tuesday, and I refuse to drink hippocras unless it is made with amber."

Garassus discovers in that expression, "my soul braves fate," and in one of the stanzas of the "Ode to King Louis XIII," in which Théophile compares him to Jove, flagrant proofs of atheism; and therefore pours out upon him a torrent of insults which would be very amusing, especially coming from a theologian, did not one remember that they nearly caused the death of the poet. The brother to whom he alludes in the poem quoted above was called Paul. He thanks him repeatedly for his kind friendship and the help which he sent him while in prison.

We have said that Théophile was a Huguenot, and that this was one of the reasons why he was persecuted. Not that he was a fierce and intolerant one, for he behaved with much sense and reserve on an occasion upon which a companion less reasonable than he got himself into serious trouble. He thus relates the adventure: —

"As we were proceeding towards the Quay Gate, we met at the corner of a lane the Holy Sacrament, which a priest was carrying to a sick man. The ceremony rather surprised

us, for we were both Huguenots, Clitiphon and I, but his protestantism was of the most uncompromising kind, as he most unseasonably showed on this occasion; for everybody kneeling in honour of the sacred mystery, I drew close up to the house, bareheaded, and bowing somewhat, as a mark of respect which I thought due to a settled custom and to the Prince's religion (God had not then done me the grace to receive me into His Church). Clitiphon proceeded insultingly to traverse the street in which every one was kneeling, without condescending to anything approaching a bow. A common man, as is often the case with such people, who through blind zeal are more easily moved to anger than pity, sprang at Clitiphon's head, knocked off his hat, and then took to shouting, 'O Calvinist!' "

So moderate a Huguenot was not far from becoming a Catholic, and as a matter of fact he did abjure his religion, perhaps through sincere conviction; but it may be conjectured that he hoped thus to protect himself against the malignity of his enemies. He was mistaken, however, for he was persecuted as fiercely as ever. He had received instruction in the Roman faith at the lectures of Father Athanasius Arnoux and Father Seguerand. An atheist, such as he was accused of being, would not have cared enough about his salvation to change his religion. The hatred of the clergy

sticks as fast as the stain of oil; to remove it you have got to cut out the piece; and the abuse of Father Garassus overflows into a big quarto volume.

"Here," said Théophile, "is another flood of insult, in which he froths at the mouth more fiercely still. He calls me atheist and corrupter of youth, and charges me with indulging in the practice of all imaginable vices. As regards the accusation of atheism, I reply that I have not published, as he and Lucilio Vanino (a professor of theology who was burned alive) have done, the maxims of impious men, which have been equal to so many lessons in atheism (for they have both refuted them, and at the end of their discussion they leave a weak mind very ill instructed in its religion). But without claiming to be a scholar in theological matters, I am satisfied, with the apostle, to know Jesus Christ crucified, and when my reason fails in the presence of such a mystery, I have recourse to the authority of the Church, and believe fully whatever she believes. As to my soul's health, I am so well satisfied with the grace of God that my mind declares itself incapable of not knowing its Creator. I adore and love Him with all the strength of my mind, and I feel deeply the obligations I am under to Him. As regards my conduct outwardly, in my rule of life I am privately and publicly a professing Roman Catholic Christian; I go to mass and confession, and I communicate. Father Seguerand, Father Athanasius, Father Aubigny can testify to that. I fast on fast days, and last Lent, being pressed by an illness to which

the physicians were about to abandon me because of my obstinacy in refusing to eat meat, I was constrained to have recourse to a dispensation lest I should be guilty of causing my own death. Father Rogueneau, my parish priest, and Dr. de Lorme, who signed the certificate, are irreproachable witnesses of the truth of this statement. I do not bring up these facts through hypocritical vanity, but because compelled, as a wretched man accused, to publish my devotion only to make my innocence plain."

Undoubtedly many a devotee of the present time does not fulfil his religious duties as carefully as an atheist in those days.

"The Satirical Parnassus," a collection of licentious verse which had just appeared under the name of Théophile and which was, as a matter of fact, merely a selection of such poems as imitators of Ronsard called *gaieties*, by different poets such as Colletet, de Frenide, Motin, Ogier, and others, served as a pretext for these various attacks, although Théophile had disavowed the work, and even caused the book to be seized and had suit brought against the printers, who, being confronted with him during his trial, declared they did not know him and had never had anything to do with him. "The Satirical Parnassus" bears the date of 1622. It is a curious literary monu-

ment in its way, this work. There is a very great difference between it and the filthy poems of Ferrand, Doret, Voisenon, and other frequenters of ladies' rooms, whether musketeers or abbés. It is as great a contrast as a head by Caravaggio, black with bitumen, by the side of a pastel by Latour, glowing with carmine, or a *basso-relievo* upon an antique vase by the side of one of Maurin's lithographs. Certainly such productions are unworthy of art, yet there is enough art left in them to cause one to regret seeing them burned, and to induce one to pull out a few leaves which have escaped the executioner's fire of straw; somewhat like that erotic museum at Naples, and beautiful statues, which no one has had the courage to break, but over which morality is obliged to draw a curtain.

What a wonderful time that sixteenth century was! For Théophile and the society in which he moves belong to the sixteenth rather than to the seventeenth century, though they had lived somewhat in the latter. It was a fertile, rich, abundant age, full of life and activity. It is wonderful even in its turpitude. How small we are by the side of those great people! They know Greek and Hebrew; their cooks speak Latin fluently; theology, archaeology, astrology, occult

sciences, they study deeply every one; they know all that exists, and even what does not exist. They take large bites of the fruits of the tree of knowledge, and they produce folio after folio; a quarto volume gives them less trouble than a duodecimo does to us. The painters and sculptors cover acres of canvas with masterpieces, and mould whole armies of statues. Men fight with swords which we can scarcely hold, in armour which would bring us to our knees. It is a time of theological quarrels, of riots, of duels, of rapes, of perilous adventures, of gross feasts in taverns; of sonnets in the Italian mode, of Greek madrigals upon a flea, of learned scholiae on obscure passages; of wildest debauches of great ladies or women of the middle class; an incredible variety, an unimaginable chaos. Blood and wine flow as freely the one as the other. Insults are exchanged in excellent Latin, men are burned alive, every girl is kissed, every dish is eaten. And such dishes — regular mountains of meat! Glasses are drained, and what glasses! It would take the contents of three of our bottles to fill them, and they are to our little goblets what the folio volumes of that day are to our octavos of to-day. What kind of ribs had those fellows around their hearts, that they

could stand such work, such lovemaking, such debauch? What had their mothers made them of? Were the nights in which they were forged forty-eight hours long like that in which Hercules was conceived? Ah, wizened wretches that we are! Wretched drunkards, miserable debauchees, paltry lovers, mean writers, contemptible duellists, — we who roll under the table at our fourth bottle, who turn pale after three or four wakeful nights, who fall into a consumption because we have had three or four mistresses, who rest for a fortnight after writing a hundred lines, and who fight only when some one seduces our wife! Oh, how greatly have men degenerated since the days of Homerus the rhapsode!

Fathers Voisin, Garassus, Guérin, and Renard brought a joint charge against Théophile. Father Voisin, who had some influence with Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld, suborned witnesses, and, with the help of Father Caussin, a Jesuit, and confessor to the King, obtained an order of arrest against de Viau.

Théophile, seeing so many enemies leagued against him, took to flight, — slowly, however, to see how the matter would turn out. He was tried and condemned by the High Court, as guilty of divine *lèse-majesté*, to

make honourable amends on the square of Notre Dame, and then to be burned alive on the Place de Grève. The sentence was pronounced on August 19, 1623; the execution was carried out in effigy. Théophile, wandering from one retreat to another, was arrested on the 27th of the following September and carried to the Conciergerie, where he was imprisoned in the Montgomery Tower and endured every imaginable suffering. Let Théophile himself relate them: —

"After five or six months of error, uncertain in what part of the world I might still the terrors of my wandering wretchedness, an incredible piece of treachery caused me to be taken to prison from the place where I had sought asylum. My protector was transformed into an officer of the law. Heavens, how difficult it is to struggle against wealth! A note from a monk, respected as much as letters patent, caused the bearer of the wandering muse to be watched in so many a place that at last two wicked provosts, both accomplished thieves and very devout, praying as if they were apostles, laid their hands upon my collar, and while saying their *pater noster*, robbed even my valet. Dazzled somewhat by the splendour of my appearance, they wondered whether I were not a counterfeiter. They questioned me as to the value of the doubloons they had taken from me, which did not bear the stamp of France. Then I trembled, fearing lest their ignorance should judge me according to their lights.

They could not fancy, without suspecting many a crime, that a mere maker of rimes should prove to be so fine a prey, and though the gold was fair and sound, both by light of day and by candle light, they believed, seeing that I was in trouble, no matter how much they took from me, that these coins were leaves of oak bearing the stamp of the witches' sabbath. Without points, lace, garters, or gloves, in the centre of ten halberdiers, I flattered the arrogant rascals that had been given to me for guards; but all the same, laden with fetters, I was thrown into the hell of a deep, black hole in which one has naught but scanty exhalations of foul air, and the cold slime of a damp and sticky old wall. Within this common place of tears wherein I beheld myself, so wretched, the very assassins and thieves had more convenient cells. Every one said of me that I knew no faith nor law; that there was no vice in which I had not indulged, and whatever I did write was worse than any murder; that a holy man of much wit, a child of the blessed Ignatius, said both in his sermons and his books that I was dead through contumacy; that I had run away only through fear of being executed as my effigy had been; that I was naught but a suborner, and that I taught magic arts within taverns of ill-fame; that the springs had been wound up of the black and powerful machine whose supple and vast body extends its arms as far as China; that in France and in foreign lands they had the means of avenging themselves and of forging a thunderbolt the stroke of which would be fatal to me, even if it cost more powder than was

lost at Vital. . . . As soon as I reached Paris, I understood by the confused rumour that all was ready to cook me alive, and I had reason to wonder whether these people were going to take me to the Grève or to prison. Here, then, as in a tomb, overborne by the peril in which I dream, alone and without a light, ever fearing execution, by the help of a little faint light which pierces somewhat this dark tower, where the executioners are ever watching — great King, the honour of the universe, I present you with the petition of this poor rimester. Did I practise the vilest trade that is practised on the streets, were I the son of cobbler or of codfish vender, it might be feared that an angry people, in order to punish the attempt of him who persecutes me, should do seditiously what its fury carries out in its blind emotion. Within this place, consecrated to misfortune, the sun, contrary to its nature, has less light and warmth than it has in paintings. The sky can scarce ever be seen; nor light nor fire is here beheld. The air we breathe is deadly and everything is icy cold, so thoroughly is it the place where the living are dead. As Alcides overcame death when he compelled it to let Theseus go, you with less effort shall do a greater and easier thing. Sign the order to set me free. Then with three fingers only you will strike down two and twenty gates, and break the iron bars of three gratings which are stronger than all the gratings in hell."

And he thus speaks in an apology addressed to the king: —

"A man who professes to be a monk and who has taken all the vows, took on himself to correct your clemency and, emboldened by my timidity, ventured to set the snares which now he is caught in. A provost of the constabulary, called Leblanc, his intimate confidant, was devoted to him. The latter took such good care to be complaisant to him in this commission that a place which can stand a royal siege proved too weak to protect me. This monk, whom this officer of justice obeyed so docilely, and who found the governor of your citadel so easy to handle, is, Sire, Father Voisin, a Jesuit, who, through unruly fancy and most scandalous caprice, is determined to avenge a wrong which was not done him, and has imagined subjects of offence in order to have a pretext to hate me. His mind has gone astray, and he is very ignorant of mine. He has instilled in weak souls a false opinion of my manners and my conscience, and, prostituting authority by his address and the extravagance of his passion, has published broadcast all those infamous accusations for which to-day he is in penitence. He entered every place of his acquaintances and kind to scatter there the evil smell which had made my reputation so odious. He suborned the zeal of a foolish Father, who vomited a whole volume to free his companion's bile. It is the author of the 'Curious Doctrine.'

"Thus did this man pour out his profanations, trusting to public ignorance. Another proclaimed in the pulpit with much shouting, 'Read the Reverend Father Garassus! I tell you to read him. It is an excellent book.' And as soon

as I was brought to this town, he adorned one of his sermons with these pretty remarks: 'Accursed be you, Théophile, and accursed be the spirit which dictated your thoughts! Accursed the hand which wrote them! Woe to the bookseller who printed them; woe to those who read them! Woe to those who have ever known you. And blessed be the chief justice and the attorney-general who have purged Paris of the pest that you are. It is you who have caused the plague to be in Paris. I shall repeat, with Reverend Father Garassus, that you are an ass, that you are a calf. A calf, do I say? But a calf's flesh is good when boiled, a calf's flesh is good when roasted, with a calf's skin are books bound; but you, wicked man, are only fit to be burned, and burned you shall be to-morrow. You have turned the monks into ridicule, and the monks shall laugh at you.'"

This is indeed a fine torrent of eloquence; this is a fine sally on the part of Jean Guérin!

The whole quarto volume of Father Garassus, for it is a quarto volume, is written in this style. It is a strange book. He insults, at one and the same time, Théophile, Luther, and a certain Lucilio Vanino. He accuses them of gluttony and atheism; he calls Théophile a poetaster, a rascal, a filthy parasite, a drunkard; he calls Luther a big German bull, a big gormandiser, who can only eat and drink, whose soul is fleshly, and

who could not fast a day but that he would think himself dead; he calls Lucilio Vanino a corrupter of youth, a naturalist, and an atheist. He shows wherein atheists are like griffins, which are a compound of mouth and belly, and like crocodiles; though there is this difference, that the griffins eat once in forty days, which has never happened to atheists, who eat forty times a day. How they go into taverns of ill-fame to dine, at two pistoles a head, with young nobles whose material shadows they are; how they may well be called caterpillars at the dinner hour, because they have innumerable feet like caterpillars to reach a table, and they live more on dishes than caterpillars do on trees; how they are only fit to produce verses before and worms after their death, and how the worst of the latter are not those which swarm in their putrid bodies; how if they did not rime sonnets and nonsense for the prostitutes kept by the sons of good families, they would run great risk of starving wretchedly and would be reduced to swallowing their slime like caged snails; and finally how they are, at one and the same time, asses, wolves, dogs, and black beetles: asses, because of their stupidity and the bacchanalian songs which it is their habit to shout at the Pine Cone and at the tavern of the

Wooded Isle; wolves, because they are ferocious, and like wolves have a stiff backbone which refuses to bend when a procession passes by; dogs, because they are shameless and they wear their plumes as dogs carry their tails, sticking up; black beetles, because they are always grubbing and rubbing their noses in filth and carry as these do a ball of filth which is their half-digested meat, with which they fill their damned guts on fast days and during Lent.

There are politeness and nice expressions for you; and yet it is quite in the usual tone of controversy between scholars in the sixteenth century. The answers of Théophile form an exceedingly rare exception, inasmuch as they are masterpieces of decency and good language. His moderation is all the more striking in comparison with that mad fury, and every decent person is bound to take his side. All the same, Parliament took two whole years to review his case. These two years were spent by him in almost incredible suffering. His cell was dark and damp. It was the cell which had been thought worthy, a few years before, to hold Ravaillac the regicide. Nothing more need be said.

The sentence against him was commuted to simple

banishment. He withdrew to Chantilly, the seat of the Duke of Montmorency, who had always been his protector and who was scarce more fortunate than his protégé, for, after having won several battles, he died on the scaffold. It was in this retreat that Théophile composed in honour of the duchess the poem entitled "Sylvia's Grove." The grove still bears that name.

Théophile did not long enjoy his freedom. Privations, troubles, excesses both of work and of debauch, suffering of all kinds, had seriously impaired his constitution, which was naturally robust. He fell ill and never recovered. A few minutes before his death he earnestly begged his friend Mayret to give him a red herring. Mayret refused, fearing that it would hurt de Viau, and all his life he reproached himself with not having indulged that last fancy of a man whom he had deeply loved. This was in the year 1626, and Théophile was only thirty-six years old. When all he accomplished in his busy and unfortunate life is taken into account, it is difficult to imagine how high he might not have risen, had Heaven been kind to him, and had he lived as long as his robust body, inured to fatigue, seemed to make it likely.

So far we have spoken only of his physical life.

We shall now examine his mental life, his poetic system, his prosody, and the nature of his defects and qualities. We shall consider him in his relation to the other poets of the times, and chiefly to Malherbe; for, as we have already said, Théophile is really a great poet, and his influence, although unseen and unexplained, is yet very marked upon contemporary literature. It is quite a surprise to meet in Théophile's writings with ideas which struck the public some ten or twelve years ago as being audaciously novel; for it is he — we are bound to say it — who initiated the Romanticist movement.

We have said that Théophile de Viau was a great poet; the fragments that I have cited above prove that he was a no less great prose writer; that his feet were as good as his wings, and that he walked as well as he flew. That is the poet's privilege; when he exchanges the language of the gods for that of men, he speaks the one as perfectly as the other. Prose writers, on the contrary, cannot write half a dozen verses. Birds can light on the ground and walk on it like quadrupeds, but quadrupeds however rapid their speed, cannot spring into the air and fly like birds. This is a fact which could easily be proved, and which

might give rise to very interesting investigations, but it would lead us too far, and we shall perhaps take it up some other day. The fact remains that the prose of Théophile is as fine as that of any other writer. It is full of the splendid Castilian forms of expression, of the well-bred terms which give to the prose of that day such a rich and imposing appearance. The style is thoroughly artistic, and is unquestionably that of the best society. The broad effects produced by the sentences recall the great stiff folds of rich old stuffs embroidered all over with gold and silver. You never see a word trip on itself and fall flat in the very middle of a sentence, as a countess born in low estate trips upon her train and falls. In all his prose writings there is a certain familiarity full of good taste. The tone is that of a nobleman accustomed to his station; it has an indefinable perfume of high aristocracy, the charm of which is inexpressible. The reader feels that he can proceed in perfect safety; he will meet with no expression which is not well received at court and approved of the King. The secret of that style will never be discovered until men again take to wearing swords, and feathers in their hats; not the small-sword of whale-bone in a velvet sheath worn by the mar-

quesses of Crébillon, nor the three-cornered hat edged with white feathers, but the great steel rapier and pointed felt hat of the blades, with its red plume. Buffon's lace cuffs show to poor advantage by the side of the slashed and lined sleeves of the fashionable men of that day. What can be more charmingly written, wittier and more delightful in every respect than the page we transcribe below, and which is the more interesting because it is in a certain sense an express profession of literary faith on the part of our poet!

Our own writers are usually elegant somewhat in this fashion, thanks to the ignorance of the public and the vanity of bookmakers: —

"The golden and azure dawn, embroidered with pearls and rubies, now showed at the gates of the Orient. The stars, dazzled by the brighter light, paled their whiteness, and little by little turned into the colour of the sky. The animals, which had been hunting, retraced their steps into the forest, and men were going back to their work. Silence was replaced by noise, and darkness by light," etc.

Composition must be close, the meaning must be naturally and easily seen, the language accurate and significant. Affected ornaments are merely the product of loose writing and artifice, and always involve effort

and unintelligibility. The ornaments which are no longer to our taste, and which are called imitations of the authors of antiquity, should be called thefts.

"Men ought to write in modern fashion. Demosthenes and Virgil did not write in our day, and we cannot write as they did in theirs. Their books, when they composed them, were new; we are composing old works every day. It is profane and ridiculous in us to call upon the Muses after the fashion of these pagans. Ronsard's vigour of mind and pure imagination are comparable in innumerable ways to the splendour of the old Greeks and Latins, and he came nearer to them than when he set to translate them, or when he took that Cytherean 'Gatarus, by whom the Tymbrean tripod —'

"He apparently strives after incomprehensibility in order to appear learned, and seeks the sham reputation of being a new and bold writer. He is unintelligible to Frenchmen when he uses these foreign terms. Such extravagance simply disgusts scholars and stupefies the weak. Some call this fashion of using obscure and inappropriate epithets barbarism and lack of culture, others call it conceit and pedantry. For myself, I believe it is due to the respect and admiration Ronsard entertained for the ancient writers, thinking whatever he found in them excellent, and seeking glory by constant imitation of them. I am aware that a prelate who is a good man may be imitated by every one. One has to be chaste and charitable as he is, and learned, if that be possible; but a courtier, in order to imitate his virtues, would in vain live or dress in that fashion.

One must write a good description, as Homer did, but not by making use of his expressions and his epithets ; we must write as he wrote, but not what he wrote. It is a praiseworthy devotion, worthy of a lofty soul, to invoke the sovereign powers at the beginning of a work, but Christians have nothing to do with Apollo and the Muses, and our modern verse, which is no longer sung to the accompaniment of the lyre, should not, therefore, be called lyric, any more than other verses of ours should be termed heroic, since we no longer live in heroic times. All this nonsense can neither please nor profit an intelligent person. It is true that distaste for these superfluities has given rise to another fault; for weaker minds, which the attraction of booty induced to take up the profession of poet, through the care they took to avoid worn-out commonplaces already repeated for so many centuries, found themselves on barren ground, and not being naturally strong or skilful enough to make use of the objects which offered themselves to their imagination, they came to the conclusion that there was naught in poetry but material for prose, and became persuaded that figures do not belong to poetry, and that a metaphor is an extravagance."

These lines were written at the beginning of the seventeenth century, but in truth one might think they had been drawn from the preface of some Romantic work which appeared but yesterday. It proves that the antagonism between the two principles has existed

at all times, and that the periwig is not a modern invention, but exists since the creation of the world. In the seventeenth, as in the sixteenth century, we shall still come upon routine, which insists upon governing expression with its heavy ruler, and which evolves recipes to enable a poet to be at will Pindaric, elegiac, or heroic. It is the great quarrel between the ancients and the moderns, which began with Ronsard and is not yet ended. For Ronsard — whose fame had been so long and so much contemned and despised, and has been restored by the Romanticists through a sort of contradiction, which, however, is not quite illogical — is unquestionably the man who introduced Classicism into France. He broke violently with the good old Gallic spirit of which Clement Marot was the last representative. It is poor Ronsard, the nobleman of Vendôme, and none else, who let in the choir of the Muses of antiquity, and who presented them at court dressed in a costume half Greek, half Gallic. He exchanged the *chant royal*, the rondeau, and all the national forms of our poetry for the strophe and the anti-strophe, the epode, and the Greek and Latin forms. He has foreign, barbarous expressions after the fashion of those you have just read, and very

many more besides. He has invented double-faced words, deformed imitations of Janus, which grammar cannot behold without terror, and of which Du Bartas made such an astounding abuse. He has syncopated verbs; he has thinned out into diminutives, after the antique mode, numbers of words which appear greatly surprised at the tail of prettinesses which have been most improperly stuck on behind them. All this is true, no doubt; but, on the other hand, he has imparted to our poetic verse a full and sonorous harmony, a virile, robust accent unknown before him. He has drawn the muscles and made the bones to be felt under the soft, pasty forms of the old idiom. He made the French Muse, already pretty old to be indulging in prettinesses and artless speeches in the puerile style of the trouvères and the minstrels, speak a tongue more suitable to her. Through the thick layer of pedantry, of obsolescence, shines out a touch of incomparable freshness and brightness. Behind his mythological figures there are landscape backgrounds brought out with inimitable feeling for nature. His muse, though draped after the Greek fashion, breathes a melancholy wholly modern in character. His sonnets have a tender grace which recalls the elegies of Tibullus and

of Propertius; but he is thoroughly Gallic at bottom, in spite of the rags which he goes picking up here and there among his authors, and his style, in spite of its efflorescence of Greek and Latin, clings sturdily to the robust trunk of the old idiom and draws all its sap from it. The vesture is different, but the body is the same. His "Discourses in Verse" contain many a passage which might have been written by the bronze pen of the great Pierre Corneille. A pedant he may be, but he is unquestionably a poet, and all poets in France since the sixteenth century descend in a direct line from him. Mathurin Régnier openly confessed himself his pupil, and what a poet must be that man whom Régnier, admirable himself, proclaims to be admirable. Corneille uses no other style than Ronsard's when he writes a political tirade, and considers the mould used by Ronsard solid enough to pour into it his adamantine verse. Molière makes use of his overlaps, of his shifting cæsura, and does not think, though so long a time has elapsed, that the methods of Ronsard have become obsolete. La Fontaine is connected with him through the numerous archaic and idiomatic expressions which impart so much savour and grace to his style, which is so French that it becomes Gallic. Leaving aside

Ronsard's own contemporaries such as Remi Belleau, Antoine Baïf, Amadys Jamin, and others, very worthy poets, such as Théophile, Saint-Amant, etc., have felt his mighty influence, and have reflected some of the beams of that magnificent sun of poesy which he caused to shine upon France.

Some time after he appeared there arose another school, an envious, unproductive school, a sorter out of words and a weigher of syllables, a school of grammarians opposed to a school of poets, as is always the case, which set about revising, stanza by stanza and comma by comma, all the verses of the Pleiad and to treat its stars most insolently. Its schoolmaster was that dry, tough, fibrous Malherbe, about whom Nicolas Despréaux Boileau, a writer of the same kidney, wrote the following superlatively triumphant lines which contain nearly as many mistakes as they do syllables: —

"At last Malherbe came, and, the first in France, imparted to verse a cadence just; of a word rightly placed the power did show, and trained the Muse to laws of duty. By this wise writer the tongue improved, no longer shocked the ear refined; with grace the stanzas learned to flow, and line into line no longer ran."

I am of opinion, notwithstanding the belief of the author of the "Ode on the Taking of Namur," that words were put in their right places even before the advent of Master François de Malherbe. As to the "cadence just," I have not ascertained that up to that time verse lacked rhythm; as for the stanzas which learned to flow gracefully, I consider for my part that the stanzas of Ronsard, the greatest lyric inventor that ever was, are turned with as much grace as those of that far from Pindaric ode, "Will you credit it, ye future generations?" and I do not think, unworthy Romanticist that I am, that the suppression of the overlap has been a very great blessing, but rather the opposite.

Malherbe, the least poetic mind that ever existed, is in verse a very close copy of what Balzac was in prose. He is full of the same narrow, fruitless purism, of the same syntactical minutiæ, and lacks to an equal degree both ideas and feeling. In Balzac's letters, as in Malherbe's verse, all is small, symmetrical, stunted; the sobriety of style is carried to the extent of meanness; there is no abundant breadth and fulness. The dress in which their ideas are clothed is too scant for them, and it has to be pulled down with both hands

to make it reach the feet. The striving after the suitable and polite expression often degenerates into preciosity; the unskilful richness of the rime brings around at the end of each line the same assonance. They are marvels second to none else, the finest in the world, expressions admirable unquestionably and of the finest art, worthy in every respect of the poets of the "Selected Pieces," but their repetition at length becomes wearisome. It is of no use to look for metaphors, figures, feeling, — for whatever, in a word, is poesy; for poesy is a closed book to them; they have not the least conception of what it is, and profess for it a contempt which strikes one as very peculiar. Malherbe could not rest until he had robbed the tongue upon which he worked of all its colouring matter, by dint of filtering it through syntax. He acted as a chemist might who should leave within his retort naught but the colourless and tasteless residue of a rich wine. Others followed him and again passed through a thicker filter the clarified liquor which he had obtained, so that, so far as poetry is concerned, the result was a language as transparent as crystal, and as cold and hard also, no doubt wonderfully well fitted for writers of treatises on mathematics. Jean-

Baptiste Rousseau, our first lyric poet, as he is called, descends directly from Malherbe, and a pretty poor product he is. So when real poets did come, they were obliged to go back abruptly and at one step to the sixteenth century in order to find there a poetic tongue, until they could manage to create one for themselves.

For the rest, there is nothing on earth comparable to the insolence and the damned coolness of Malherbe. His answer to Yvrande, Racan, Collomby, and a few others of his friends, about Ronsard, half of whose poems he had blotted out and the remaining portion of which he struck out, is well known. His coarse and brutal reply to Desportes, to whom he said that his soup was better than his Psalms, and that he need not take the trouble to go and fetch the latter; the way in which he treated Pindar, and his preference for Statius and Seneca, suffice to enable one to judge of the extent of his good breeding and of the soundness of his judgment. At the time that Théophile was being tried, he said that for his part he believed him innocent, but that if people were to be burned for writing poor verse, Théophile thoroughly deserved to go to the stake; and turning to Racan, he added,

"But you run no risk of being accused of being his accomplice."

Théophile, who speaks of Malherbe in some parts of his work, judged him very cleverly and wittily; and without estimating him above his worth he did him the kind of justice which in a way he deserves. Here is what he says of him:—

"I never was conceited enough to take from Malherbe's verse the French which that verse taught us."

And elsewhere:—

"Let who will imitate others' marvellous work; Malherbe did very well, but he worked for himself. Numberless small thieves are skinning him alive; as for me, I envy not such thefts. I quite approve of every one writing in his own fashion. I approve of his reputation, but not of his teaching. Those begging writers who lack inspiration borrow constantly his rimes or his style, and join the gold and silk of so many fine things which we admire in him to ugly rags; thus appearing in our day as ill-conditioned as of yore appeared Horace's crow. They work for a whole month seeking how they can rime *fils* and *Memphis*, *Lebanon* and *turban*, and the gloomy rivers often find it difficult their bounds to know. Their straining makes them unintelligible; never once do they clearly see. I know some who write verse in modern fashion only, and who, at

high noon, with lighted lantern seek the sun ; who so scrape their French that it is torn to bits, and who blame whatever their taste considers easy. They take a month in learning speech by touch ; when the accent is harsh or the rime weak, they strive to make us believe that all they do is fine, and that their fame will last beyond the tomb, for no other reason save that they have spent their life in turning out a tiny piece of work ; that their verse will last, treasured by the world, because they have grown old in making it, just as a spider, a clean web spinning, uses up its life for a transient result."

Boileau may have had this tirade in mind when he said, —

" In patchwork verse they tear Malherbe to bits."

The lines of Théophile are as sound as they are witty ; he turns them in clean, easy fashion, and with irreproachable taste. It is impossible to criticise more wittily Malherbe's defects, while appearing to attack his imitators only. Further, he shows us that the quarrel between writers who work with difficulty and facile writers, between grammarians and poets, existed even then. Malherbe had already said that after writing a discourse of three pages and a poem a hundred lines long, a man should rest for ten years. Théophile has admirably hit off the disdainful critics

who "blame whatever their taste considers easy," and who devote their life to weaving a work which has no greater strength than a cobweb, and which is none the better for having taken so much time in the composition. Worthy Régnier took upon himself to pen a companion picture, in which it is difficult to know which to praise most, the boldness of the sketch or the warmth of the colouring. It is in his satire addressed to the poet Rapin, and nothing is wanting to that apostrophe of old Régnier, not even the word "art," so much abused now-a-days, and which is turned to account to hinder those who are real artists.

Théophile, in the quotation given above, criticises with admirable common sense all the wretched scriveners of fantastic temper who, themselves as impotent as hornets, think it ill that bees should love flowers and make honey; for, properly speaking, figures and metaphors are the flowers of the garden of poesy, and he who wants them to be cut away knows nothing of poesy; the Greek bee has dropped no honey on his lips. He is fit only to write in poetic prose, that is, in the worst language known to earth next to prosaic verse, an inversion which unfortunately is popular in the days of literary trials in which we live.

Everything which Théophile calls for, we called for at the time of the poetic revolt which took place under the Restoration, and no one can deny that much-abused Théophile is right, both as regards the matter and the form, in what he says. Hence all the anathemas which have been hurled at him and the bitter animosity which certain people entertain towards him. Every one knows how vicious and terrible is literary hatred; our own days have shown to what an extent it can be carried; it is even bitterer, if that be possible, than political hatred, for the latter usually touches self-interest only, while the other hurts wounded or suffering self-love, which is much worse.

Théophile proscribed the use of mythology, and wished the decrepit divinities of ancient Olympus to be left in their worn-out paper heaven. He was of opinion that rosy-fingered dawn had ceased to be very entertaining, and was getting terribly blotched in the face; that it was high time to drop Phœbus, with his blond wig and his hurdy-gurdy, and that, after all, the bass viol of pale-faced Saint Cecilia was at least as good as the trump of blowsy Clio. He appeared to care very little for the symbolic virginity

of the nine sacred maids, — an unpardonable crime, — and he did not have much more use for poor little naked Cupid. He pitilessly pulls out the feathers of his wings, takes from him his quiver, his torch, his leaden and golden arrows, and all his old-time paraphernalia. If Alfred de Musset asked of the poet in the magnificent opening lines of "Rolla," —

"Do you regret the days when heaven and earth lived and shone in a nation of gods? When Venus Astarte, uprisen from the wave, shook off, a virgin yet, a mother's tears, and fertilised the world as she twisted her hair?"

He would have replied proudly and without wasting a single sigh upon all those lovely chimeras forever vanished: —

"Of yore the mortals spoke with the gods; these incessantly rained down from heaven. Sometimes animals themselves prophesied; the oaks of Dodona were oracles, too. These tales trouble bold spirits, which now feel differently from men of yore. On this point some day I hope to speak."

I know of no modern writer who exhibits such marked disdain for ancient mythology, who kicks so insolently those poor devils of gods who cannot help themselves. It would not have been so bad, either, if

he had been satisfied with being impious and atheistic with respect to bygone divinities; so much might perhaps have been forgiven him; but he did not stop there, the confounded innovator that he was.

You all know how powerful Phyllis was in those days; how she was petted, lauded, sung in madrigals, what innumerable sighs were uttered on her account; how many fainting fits, gallantly indiscreet dreams, intoxications, and despairs, quatrains and stanzas, short lines and long lines, blank verse and other verse, sonnets, complaints, and songs she was the cause of. All the echoes and parrots of that day knew her name by heart. Her eyes gave birth to six thousand sonnets, each single hair of her head produced one, her lips inspired more than there are saints in the calendar; I will not attempt to enumerate those which were rimed about her bosom, for the whole of the Arabic and Roman numerals would be insufficient.

Well, that Phyllis, so high bred, so precious, ever young, ever fair, who appears to have been for two or three centuries the only woman in France, that Phyllis, whom he had courted himself as others had done, — he one day throws in her face like a challenge these brutal lines: —

"As oft as love recalls to my heart the innumerable charms of the eyes of my fair, and what honour it is to love so well, I esteem myself greater and happier than a god. Amarantha, Phyllis, Calista, Pasiphaë, — I hate the softness of your names; the effort to attribute to you so many charms proves that in fact your eyes had none. The divine belief of my gentle love is that Mary's name is the fairest on earth. Whatever the care that broods over me, it is cured by the utterance of that fair name. My heart is moved, my soul is touched by the secret charms of hidden virtue. I constantly call on her, I cannot refrain, no other remembrance within my mind doth rest; — naught else I know, none else I see. Would to God she knew the pain I feel!"

Mary — oh, fie! Mary, the name of the Mother of God, the name of a queen, the name of a Christian! This is unparalleled abomination. What depravation of taste to prefer such a name to those beautiful Greek and Latin names, so mellifluous, so euphemistic! From that time Théophile was lost for good.

Add to this that he was going to write, had not death prevented him, a poem, not on the death of Adonis or some similar subject, as it would have been decent of him to do, but a national poem drawn from our old chronicles, —

"And these old forgotten portraits, retraced in my poem, will spring from the old chronicles, and, restored by my verse, will rise greater in the esteem of the world."

You see that his plan of insurrection was complete, and that in every respect it was identical with the revolution which has just taken place, even to the return to the Middle Ages.

Besides these points of resemblance there is also the seeking after colour and the study in nature itself of landscape and picturesque effects. He paints a picture with a figure and a landscape after the manner of Giorgione, of a golden, transparent, fresh colour, the drawing of which, though somewhat mannered in the contours, is nevertheless neither inaccurate nor lacking in charm. He lays the scene in a forest, or rather, in a park, probably that of Chantilly, where he is walking with his mistress; and to find in French poetry a poem more thoroughly full of love, of the cooing of doves, of breaths and of sighs, more divinely scented with the perfume of wild flowers, one is forced to come down to the earlier "Meditations" of Lamartine,—that is to say, to our greatest poet. His Elvire is the mate of Théophile's Corinne, and he alone could impart so much coolness to the foliage and so much melody to

the ripple of the water, to the sigh of the breeze. There is in Théophile's poem a breath of that love which inspired Solomon with his admirable "Song of Songs." Only Théophile's love is more sensual, less Christian and mystical than that of Lamartine, as is to be expected. One would seek in vain in the ethical, dry poetry of Malherbe anything approaching the vivacity, nobility, harmony, and correctness of Théophile's verse. Malherbe's lines to the Viscountess d'Auchy and his sonnets on Fontainebleau are inconceivably dry and barren, and yet it was into these, if ever, that he should have put passion and colour. These two qualities are found to a greater extent in the simplest poem by Théophile than in all Malherbe's book; which fortunately is not very big, for God has willed by a special grace that men who write such verses as Malherbe's shall not be able to write many. It is true that there occur in the work of Théophile rather numerous passages in bad taste, but his bad taste is ingenious and amusing, sparkling, interesting, unexpected, after the fashion of that of the Cavalier Marini, and is due, in general, merely to a striving after novelty. Nor does Malherbe, dry as he is, possess by any means taste as good as it is customary to claim for him; even

leaving aside "The Tears of Saint Peter," there are to be met with in his most famous poems lines excessively mannered and forced antitheses which are characteristic of the rhetorician. But his bad taste is dull, timid, and does not strike one at once; it is caused, not by exuberance as in Théophile, but by poverty and narrowness, and therefore less frequently finds an opportunity to exhibit itself. Théophile thoroughly understood this, and expressed it when he satirised the so-called poets who see in poetry simply material for prose, and consider a metaphor a piece of extravagance.

Théophile wrote at Chantilly three or four pieces of verse, in which, amid a great number of beauties, appear also an equally large number of faults of taste. These pieces are unfortunately too long to be quoted here. They are semi-mythological, semi-descriptive, and bear a strikingly personal and peculiar stamp. I know not whether you have ever seen in a museum one of those paintings in which Albano draws, upon a background so green that it shows black, a swarm of little white Cupids with tiny and very pink wings, or whether you have seen in the Louvre that charming water-colour by Decamps, representing women

bathing. If you know either or both, you will have some notion of the delightful stanzas of Théophile. They are full of great trees, — mighty old oaks whose tops are rounded off with a plume of dark green, and which stand out against an ultra-marine sky dappled here and there with white and fleecy clouds; or terraces of brick with stone facings, great flowers blooming in marble vases, and gently sloping stairs with paunchy balustrades. Or, again, a Louis XIII park in all its magnificence: through the trees and behind the groves one catches a glimpse of tame deer white as snow; partridges and China pheasants walk familiarly up and down the walks with all their brood; brooks babble under arcades of foliage and fall into the pools and the fish-ponds, where lazily float in the sparkling water a few swans with curved neck and open wings. In the foreground, by way of figure, a handsome young woman, seated upon the tall, rich grass of the bank, is fishing in the reservoirs for gorgeous red and blue fishes; in the depths of the valleys, little plump, white, dimpled Cupids are playing together; and then a group of those lovely allegorical nymphs that painters gave us in those days, somewhat related to those of Rubens, more women than goddesses, with jutting

breasts, broad, sweeping hips, plump, rounded arms, dimpled hands and cheeks, their golden hair floating behind them like a golden mantle, clear blue eyes, lips smiling and red as the poppy, shoulders and back lily white and polished as agate, shining in the green water as if they were so many submerged ivory statues. The waters are so clear and fresh in their framework of verdure that at night the stars descend from heaven to bathe in them. The valley is so solitary and discreet that even chaste Diana does not fear to bring thither her Endymion and to kiss his brow with her silver lips. It is a paradise that disgusts you with the terrestrial paradise; one of those lovely dreams which poets and painters dream in the evening when they watch the sun set behind the great chestnut-trees; dreams such as I have often dreamed at my window as I looked at the brick buildings and the slate roofs of my Place Royale and heard the sound of the water splashing in the fountains and the wind soughing through the trees.

It is difficult to state the rank which Théophile should occupy among the poets of the day. He died very young, and did not have time to carry out his ideas, at least in any but an incomplete fashion; but

taking him as he was, it seems to us that, Régnier having passed away and Corneille not having yet arisen, he is the most remarkable poet of that period. He is better than Hardy and Porchère, than Bois-Robert, Maynard, Gombauld, and all the wits of that day, who, for the matter of that, are of more worth than most people seem to believe. Saint-Amant is the only one, in our opinion, who can at all equal him, but Saint-Amant is a great poet of splendidly bad taste and of a hot and luxurious facility, which conceals many diamonds in his dunghill; he lacks, however, the elevation and the melancholy of Théophile, though he makes up for it by a grotesqueness and a dash which Théophile did not possess. The one writes verse like a stout man, the other like a thin man, — that is the difference. As to Malherbe and Racan, although they are more irreproachable, they are unquestionably inferior to him, and we have always been amazed at the contempt and forgetfulness which have fallen since so long a time upon a name so remarkable in many respects, now that the reforms which he sought to introduce are accepted by every one. Perhaps that will be thought quite simple and natural. But we have got to go back to his day; and by what happened

later it may be seen that Théophile was of a progressive mind and ahead of his age. All truths have always had some poor Saint John the Precursor, who walks off the road, preaches in the desert, and dies at his work. Théophile was such an one; and if he were to return now to this world, there can be no doubt that he would be one of the brightest stars of the new Pleiades.

An interesting point to be noted is that Théophile is the first one who wrote a work in prose and verse. The subject is the death of Socrates, a subject which has been treated by Lamartine also, — a curious coincidence, if it happens to be unintentional.

And that is about all that I can tell you about my namesake. If you would like to know more, try to discover his complete works, published in a thick volume, rather badly printed and full of mistakes, which is sometimes to be found upon the parapet of the Pont Neuf and in the boxes of the second-hand booksellers. Besides the lines we have quoted, you will read others very beautiful, some remarkable sonnets, and enough odes and elegies to amply repay you for the twenty sous the book will have cost you.

Saint-Amant

III

SAINT-AMANT

WHAT is known of Saint-Amant's life amounts to very little; not because he led a quiet, uneventful life unworthy of the honour of biography, — far from it, — but Saint-Amant was a man of pleasure, accustomed to the life of the world, the life of society, very careless as to what posterity might do with his name; so he left no documents concerning himself. What Boileau says of him is a piece of pure invention, which does not deserve the least credit. The study of the literary history of the day proves readily that most of the other assertions of the famous critic are just as baseless, and that his judgments in matters of taste, hitherto considered final, are far from being always impartial and judicious.

Marc-Antoine Gérard, Sire of Saint-Amant, equerry, was born at Rouen in the year 1594. A number

of writers, among them Ménage and Brossette, have stated that Saint-Amant was a gentleman glass-maker, but they are mistaken. Maynard's epigram does not mean that he was actually a gentleman glass-maker, but alludes to a glass-making privilege which he requested of Chancellor Séguier in 1638, as may be seen by a petition in verse which is found in the third part of his works. It is quite certain that Saint-Amant was not a glass-maker, but that he managed a fine large factory, the products of which were perfect enough to be purchased for royal residences. Besides, he would not have incurred the loss of the privileges of nobility had he himself blown glass. That was the resource of many poor gentlemen who had lost their fortunes. This particular business was not considered degrading, and did not deprive a man of the right to wear a sword. Exposing those who practised it to almost certain death on account of the burning air of the furnaces, it was not abased to the rank of peaceful and menial trades; for it required courage to take it up, and courage in France has always been counted the true and simple mark of nobility.

His father, a very distinguished naval officer, served Queen Elizabeth for twenty-two years, and was three

years a prisoner in the Black Tower at Constantinople. His two brothers, one of whom served under Gustavus the Great, were killed while fighting the Turks. He was himself attached for a long time to the Count of Harcourt, a cadet of the house of Lorraine, whom he followed to La Rochelle, Savoy, Sardinia, and Gibraltar, where he behaved not as a poet, but as a brave man, or rather, both as a brave man and a poet, for he has written on this subject one of his best poems, which has a curious likeness to the poems of Victor Hugo, "Canaris" and "Navarino," and especially to de Vigny's "Sérieuse," no doubt a fortuitous coincidence. He was gentleman in waiting to Mary Louisa of Gonzaga, who had become Queen of Poland by her marriage to Ladislas Sigismond. In addition he enjoyed a pension of three thousand livres, which his friend, the Abbé de Marolles, had procured for him. Many noblemen, occupying some of the best positions at court, treated him with the most cordial familiarity. He was a member of the French Academy; he travelled a great deal and visited every court in Europe, and was received everywhere with distinction. This is a long way from the Homeric poverty, which proves nothing against his talent, but which the Parnassian

pedagogue dared to reproach him with in the following lines : —

"Heaven on Saint-Amant bestowed but his vein,
His sole inheritance was the coat he wore ;
A bed and two requests his whole wealth formed, —
That is, to speak plain, Saint-Amant a beggar was."

It is not true, either, that he came to court to make himself and his verse known. His works had already been printed for a long time, and his fine "Ode on Solitude" had gained him deserved reputation. Saint-Amant, whatever Boileau may say to the contrary, won much success. His peculiar qualities, and even his defects, were bound to attain this result in a literature yet permeated by the vigorous savour of Ronsard, and which the school of verse-making grammarians, founded by Malherbe and continued by Despréaux, was striving to despoil of its colour and individuality.

No doubt Saint-Amant was occasionally in straitened circumstances. That must have happened more than once in a life of travel and pleasure such as he led ; but such troubles are known to all rich men's sons who have allowed Pactolus to slip too quickly between their fingers, and who are hard put to it while waiting for the payment of the first instalment of their allowance. Saint-Amant was a high liver in the

fullest sense of the words; a scientific and passionate drunkard, worthy of being a past master in the Order of Vineyards; an ultra-gourmand, knowing good things better than any one else. He was a drunkard and a gourmand in most Gallic and Rabelaisian fashion. His deep respect, his almost tender veneration for cheese ripened green and blue, for a boar's-ear, for a smoked ox-tongue, for quince jam, hams, and other incentives to hard drinking is worth noting. He is quite like the Greek mentioned in "The Way to Success," who wished he had a neck as long as a stork's so that he might the longer enjoy the drinking of the September vintage, and who could not conceive of any happier fate in this or any other world than that of being a wine funnel. Saint-Amant enjoys a meal in a low tavern; he enjoys a delicate supper in a reputable or a disreputable place, at Coiffier's, at the Île-au-Bois, and in Laplante-le-Borgne's tavern. He is there in his element; his big, red face lights up with satisfaction, he calls for drink louder than Pantagruel did when he came into the world. He cries "Stake!" to this one and that, and never shirks drinking a health. Like the monk of Amiens, who grew wroth at not finding in Florence, the city of

pictures and statues, a single eating-house, he swears madly at Evreux, which has twenty churches and not even a single tavern. It would be a mistake to suppose, however, that Saint-Amant is a vulgar drunkard who drinks for the sake of drink. Not at all; he is a drunkard after the fashion of Hoffman, — a poetic drunkard, who thoroughly understands an orgy and knows what fire may flash from the clinking of the glasses of two clever men. He understands that genius is but the intoxication of reason, and he gets drunk as often as he can. There are some men who have the power of separating at will their dream from reality, and of wholly abstracting themselves from their surroundings, — La Fontaine, for instance, who was absent-minded all his life. Others are compelled to have recourse to factitious means, to wine or opium, in order to put to sleep the prison jailer and to let their fancy rove. Of these is Saint-Amant. The inspiring beam reaches him much more brilliant and richly coloured through the rosy paunch of a wine flagon; his metaphor springs forth more boldly when it accompanies the cork of the bottle and strikes the ceiling at the same time with it. How vivid is his touch then, how brilliant, how rapid! He is no

longer the same man; he is, as it were, a poet within a poet.

Now tell me, does not his inequality, full of flamboyant gleams and of deepest obscurity, of loftiest summits and deepest abysses, please you a great deal better than severe and worthy mediocrity, starless and cloudless, lighted everywhere with a pale artificial day resembling the light of candles? A writer such as he was, so hot, so full of life, with flesh and blood after the manner of Rubens, a mind at once German and Spanish, a man who had seen so many things and who painted with colours peculiar to himself what he had seen with his own eyes, could not in the least approve himself to Boileau with his sober and narrow mind; Boileau, who was an impassioned critic, and an ignorant one, save as regards ancient literature; Boileau, who was a poet speaking always of verse and of rime, and never of poetry; a skilful adapter in whose whole work there are practically not four lines which are absolutely his own; a short-sighted satirist who can see no other crimes in the world, no other vices to lash than mistakes of grammar or discordant lines. Therefore Boileau speaks most disdainfully of Saint-Amant in his "Art of Poetry." It is true that by way of compensation he

grants him, in his "Reflections upon Longinus," genius enough for debauched work, but grudgingly.

Nevertheless, Saint-Amant is undoubtedly a very great and very original poet, worthy of being cited with the best of those whom France delights to honour. His rime is extremely rich, abundant, unexpected, and often unlooked for; his rhythm is harmonious, skilfully maintained and used; his style very varied, very picturesque, very full of fantasy, sometimes lacking taste, but always entertaining and novel. I shall show by analyses and quotations the character and the spirit he managed to impart to the smallest things; but before we estimate his literary value, it would be well to finally get rid of the biographical details. Fortunately, we have not much more to say. Saint-Amant was not a thorough Greek and Latin scholar, he says so himself. On the other hand, he knew English, Spanish, and Italian very well, and further, he was an excellent musician and played acceptably on the lute. He alludes several times, in the course of his works, — not very modestly, we are bound to say, — to his musical talent; in "Moses Saved," among others, in which, in order to give an idea of the exquisite song of the nightingale, he compares it to his charming performances on the lute;

which would lead one to believe that he played not as a mere amateur, but as a consummate virtuoso. This fact is rather remarkable, too, in a French poet, for there are not many who are both musicians and poets, except perhaps in very distant times; for poetry and music, which might be believed to be sisters, are more antagonistic than is generally thought. There is but a very small number of musicians capable of re-writing the lines of a libretto when it does not happen to suit them; there is no poet that I am aware of, who can sing correctly the easiest of airs. Victor Hugo particularly abhors the opera, and even grinding organs; Lamartine flees when a piano is opened; Alexandre Dumas sings about as well as Mlle. Mars or the late Louis XV of harmonious memory; and I, if it be permissible to mention hyssop after having spoken of cedars, I am bound to confess that the screaking of a saw and the scraping of the fourth string by the cleverest violinist produce exactly the same effect upon me. This is a remark which no one has made before me, and which I have verified so far as the circle of my acquaintances has enabled me to do so. I give it to the public, and shall be very glad if some scientific man will take hold of it and experiment on it on a larger

scale. It would help to reduce music to its true rank; for people affect to look upon it as if it were poetry itself, though music is addressed more particularly to the senses, and poetry to thought, which is a very different thing. Music affects animals. There are dilettante sporting dogs who go into fits when they hear the swell organ played, and poodles who follow street singers, howling in the most harmonious and enchanting fashion. But if you read the finest verses in the world to these animals, they scarcely take notice of them.

Besides his talent as a lute player, Saint-Amant also possessed the gift of reading his verses admirably well; so very well that he completely concealed their defects, and there was no way of telling the best from the good and the mediocre from the worst. Gombaud, often deceived by this magic power and annoyed at being always caught, wrote an epigram on the subject which is not to be read literally any more than any other epigram: —

> "Your verse is beautiful when you speak it,
> But it is worthless when I read it.
> You cannot always speak it, —
> Write some, then, so I can read it."

He was one of the first members of the Academy, in which he was succeeded by the Abbé Cassaigne.

He was granted the privilege of not making a speech on being received, on condition that he would take charge of the burlesque and jovial part of the famous Dictionary, the subject of so many jokes; and certainly he was better fitted than any one else to do this successfully, both in theory and from experience, for his vocabulary in this line is very extensive and very picturesque. His writings show that the French language is neither so prudish nor so prim as people would have it, and that, just as well as any other language on earth, it can find the right word for the right thing, and can perfectly well say what it does not care to conceal.

In 1656 Queen Christina, when the members of the Academy were presented to her, readily recognised Saint-Amant, and expressed to him the pleasure she felt in seeing him a member of the illustrious company. This happened five years before his death. It would seem, therefore, that he was not so utterly discredited as Boileau chooses to affirm.

Having begun his poem of "Moses," he travelled on to Warsaw on purpose to show to Mary de Gonzaga, to whom the work is dedicated, the part which he had already written. He was stopped at Saint-Omer,

as may be seen by the following extract from the prefatory letter: —

"This great favour, Madam, did not confine itself only to aiding the work, but also aided the workman himself; for when I was going to Poland to pay my most faithful duty to your Majesty, and to bring you what I had written of my poem, I was arrested by the garrison of Saint-Omer. No doubt that if I had not said at once that I had the honour to be one of your gentlemen in waiting, and had not been protected by such splendid and strong armour, I should have been unable to parry that stroke of misfortune. I should have risked the loss of my life, and 'Moses Saved' would have been 'Moses Lost.' But the men who arrested me, fierce and insolent though they were, respected in the servant the greatness of the mistress; the splendour of so famous a name made them retain the bolt they were ready to launch at me, and their eyes, seeing that name shine like a fair star on the first of the books of my work, were so dazzled by it that they dared no longer look upon it. Fear lest some profane curiosity might have made a copy thereof led me to resolve henceforth to change its aspect and the whole plot. The desire of accomplishing this purpose never left me during my trip. I even tried on several occasions, but in adverse places, to carry it out; but I discovered that the Muses of the Seine were so delicate that they had been unable to follow me on this long trip; that the fatigue of the journey had upset them, and that I absolutely required a solitary and natural retreat where these

lovely virgins could dwell, so that I might carry out what I projected. That was why I returned to France, Madam, and if I have done wrong in so returning, I trust your Majesty will graciously forgive me, since it is due to that fact that I have better ordered and completed what I would never have undertaken save to contribute in some way to your Majesty's diversion."

In some lines which he wrote he seems to manifest a desire to become naturalised in Poland, but Saint-Amant did not become Saint-Amanski; he returned to France and rewrote "Moses" under the title of "Heroic Idyl," a title which drew down upon itself sharp criticism, in spite of the Academy's approval, which the author rests upon in the Preface, remarkable, both from the point of view of style and as containing the literary opinions of the poet. Here are a few extracts from it: —

"I have introduced episodes to fill the scene, if I may so speak; and without observing fully the rules of the ancients, which I nevertheless revere and am not ignorant of, I made wholly new rules for myself because of the novelty of my invention, believing that reason alone would be a sufficiently powerful authority to justify them. For indeed, provided a thing is judicious and suits times, places, and persons, what matters it whether Aristotle has or has not approved it? Stars

have been discovered in these later ages which, had he seen them, would have made him see other things than he has said, and our modern philosophy is not always in accordance with his in all its principles and definitions."

A little farther on, apologising for the use of some obsolete words, he says: —

"A tall and venerable antique chair sometimes looks very well and maintains its rank in a room adorned with the most fashionable and splendid furniture. For my part, whatever may be said in praise of the Greek and Latin tongues, however rich they may be and whatever advantages they may have over ours, I cannot but believe that Homer and Virgil considered them poor and incomplete in comparison with the richness and abundance of their thoughts, and that they always had in their own minds some hidden images which they could not express with their pen. That is my view; — some other man will express his.

"I foresee also that those who care only for imitations of the ancients, who make idols of them, and who would have men servilely bound to say nothing but what the ancients have said — as if the human mind were not free to produce anything new — will affirm that they would think more highly of what I might have plagiarised from some one else than of anything which I could give them out of my own resources. It is true that I do not greatly enjoy adorning myself with other people's feathers, as did the crow in Horace, and that usually I confine

myself to making bouquets of small flowers gathered in my own garden.

"I should like, by way of conclusion, to say a word about my style and the method I have followed in writing my verses, if time allowed me. I would say that I am not of the same opinion as those who insist that the meaning should always be completed at the end of the second and fourth lines. The measure must be interrupted occasionally, in order to diversify it more, for it causes to the ear a certain weariness which can only arise from continuous uniformity. I would say that this is what is called in musical language changing the intervals or the rhythm in order to return to it more agreeably. I should call it the difference between narrative and descriptive style; and after I had said all that at great length and with the requisite detail, I should not have said the hundredth part of what may be said about it."

These lines show to which side belonged Saint-Amant in the great quarrel of the ancients and the moderns which made so much noise at that time. His remarks, which appear to-day of patriarchal simplicity and almost stupid, so true are they, were in those days singularly bold. He was indeed courageous, and launched point-blank the most unheard-of paradoxes. What! so long as a thing is suited to persons, times, and places, it matters little whether Aristotle approved of it or not? But that is monstrous; you must be a

very wicked man to maintain such heresy. Men have been burned for less. In one and the same preface you preach liberty and the progress of the human mind and you value a native flower which blooms, fresh and perfumed, in the sunshine of inspiration, more than all those artificial, foreign plants transplanted with great difficulty from the ancient into the hothouses of the modern Parnassus? You prefer your plumage, such as it is, to the plumage of the peacock, so rich and varied, in which you could disguise yourself? You affirm that Homer and Virgil must have complained of the poverty of the Greek and Latin tongues? You preach in favour of varied verse with mobile caesura and irregular cadence, neither more nor less than a modern young Romanticist? I am bound to say that you deserve the ferule strokes which Boileau deals out to you here and there with his learned hand in his "Satires" and in his "Art of Poetry."

"Moses Saved" was exceedingly successful, although it is far from being an irreproachable work; but the descriptive portions are extremely brilliant and compensate for many defects. Description is what Saint-Amant excels in. His numerous voyages to

Italy, England, America, the Canaries, Spain, Africa, the Mediterranean, and elsewhere enabled him to vary his palette infinitely and to enrich it with original and striking colours.

"I feel sure," he says, "that those who have not travelled as much as I have, and who are not acquainted with all the rarities of nature because they have not seen almost all of them as I have, will not regret my telling them of some of these. The description of the smallest things is my peculiar property; it is to this that I most frequently devote my little talent."

On his return from Poland he began to live in a wiser and better-ordered manner. He lodged in the Rue de Seine. In spite of his disorderly life, he had always been naturally pious at bottom, and a fine religious feeling breathes in some of the poems which he wrote towards the end of his life. That is the only period when Boileau's charge of poverty seems to have some basis. It appears that he lacked money to pay his host, who, for the matter of that, did not ask for it, having known him for a long time and aware that he would never cheat him. This caused him to sink into a state of melancholy, which the death of that very host and the fear of finding himself without means increased still further, and which led him to his grave after a few

days' illness in the year 1666. Some say that the failure of a poem in praise of Louis XIV, entitled "The Speaking Moon," on which he had built great hopes, was the cause of his death. This is scarcely likely. A man has to be a Kirke White or a Keats — that is to say, to be exceedingly simple and not more than twenty — to die of such a cause. The susceptibility of our older authors is not quite so morbid, however deep may be their poetical vanity. Now, Saint-Amant was far from being a beginner, for he was then about sixty-seven years of age.

It remains, in order to complete the physical and material picture of the poet, to draw his portrait, after having told of his life and death. It is not a difficult matter, and can be done in a few words. Saint-Amant was big, stout, short, with soft eyes, bright complexion, fair, curly hair like a German count, a round, open face, red lips, and a pair of curling moustaches. A near relative of Falstaff, preferring a cask of claret to all the Phyllises upon earth, he calls himself repeatedly "good, big Saint-Amant," paunch, hogshead, barrel, and other like epithets which would be scarcely suitable to a poet who had starved to death. His stoutness had become somewhat proverbial in the company he fre-

quented, but although he was big and stout, he was not stupid — far from it. Terburg's landsknecht, who is drinking out of a huge glass in a courtesan's room, may give our reader, or readers (for we hope we shall have more than one), a very correct idea of the figure and costume of our poet. A glance at that picture will teach him more than all we could say, supposing, which, to say the least, is doubtful, he is curious to know accurately the appearance of a discredited and utterly forgotten author.

Saint-Amant, although a stout drunkard, is nevertheless not exclusively a bacchanalian poet after the manner of Panard, Désaugiers, and the members of the Caveau. He can write something more lofty than a drinking song, and he often exhibits a fine lyric power. His "Solitude," which was published a great many times and translated into Latin verse, is, for the time at which it appeared, a very beautiful piece of work. It contains in germ the greater part of the literary revolution which took place later. In it, nature is studied directly, and not through the work of previous masters. There is nothing in the so-called classic poets of that day so fresh in colour, so transparent in light, so vague and melancholy in reverie,

so calm and sweet in manner, as the qualities which make the "Ode on Solitude" so charming. The poet is wandering in a lonely place where the noise of the world does not reach him, and he describes what he sees, not in the dry, geometric manner of the Abbé Delille, but with a freedom, a skilfulness of touch, and a feeling which reveal a great master. It is scarcely possible to do better in the picturesque style. There are great trees which witnessed the birth of time, that seem still young, so green is their foliage, so cool and humid is their shade. They bow their heads gently as they listen to the warbling of the nightingale, as do dilettanti at the Italian opera; they yield up to the rosy fingers of the breeze their thick crowns, and cradle in their arms the nests of doves and bullfinches. The scented hawthorn, beloved of spring, showers its silvery snows upon the emerald sward. From the summit of a precipitous mount, whose gullied sides show ochre and chalk, falls a fierce torrent which races madly through the green, wild valley, and which soon, its fury spent, meanders through the high, thick grass like an azure-backed serpent and makes a crystal throne for the local Naiad. Further on, a pool edged with beam-trees, alders, and

willows; the gladioli and the reeds quiver in the wind; the timid frog leaps and plunges into the water when any one draws near; the heron picks at its feathers, careless of the hunter; innumerable aquatic birds sport, and swim, and play together. On the motionless surface of the waters, into which no traveller has ever dipped his hand to drink and which no oar has ever rippled, floats the water lily. Newton Fielding, the Raphael of ducks, would not have done any better with his rich and sparkling pencil. The scene changes again. It is now an old, ruined castle in which wizards and witches hold their sabbath revels and where dwell hobgoblins. The osprey sings its funereal song to the dancing imps; adders and owls nestle in walls which the slug soils with its silvery slime. The floor of the highest room has fallen into the cellar; ivies grow on the hearths. On the gibbet of accursed timber the wind rattles the skeleton of a poor, rejected lover, who has hanged himself in despair; — and, with due regard to Boileau, I think the suicide's body is admirably placed. After having wandered for some time through the ruins in which pale Morpheus sleeps in the arms of Idlesse, lying upon sheaves of poppies, the poet ascends a steep cliff, the brow of which seems

to seek the realms of mist, and from that point he watches the wide-stretching sea which bears in and carries away the pebbles on the shore. He sees sponges, seaweed, ambergris, or bodies of stranded monsters floating about; he sees the heavy Tritons rising above the tumultuous waves, sounding their trumps and calming the storm. Then comes this fine strophe, marvellously like the one in Victor Hugo's "Fire of Heaven." Saint-Amant is speaking of the sea: —

"Sometimes, most limpid, it resembles a floating mirror, and reflects the skies within its waters. The sun shows so clear within it, as it contemplates its fair face, that one doubts for a time whether it is the sun or its image, for at first it seems that it has fallen from the skies."

The poem ends with a few witty strophes of *envoi*.

The ode entitled "The Contemplator," although less known and less frequently quoted than the "Ode to Solitude," contains passages of great beauty and of the same general character. It is a reverie about everything and nothing, — about a passing fish, a cormorant that flies away, a fluttering moth, a floating halcyon's nest, — mingled with religious reflections and pious aspirations. The poem is addressed to a prelate, Philippe Cospeau, Bishop of Nantes.

This, however, is but one side of Saint-Amant's talent. The grotesque, that indispensable element which small, narrow minds have striven to reject from the domain of art, abounds in his verse, and squirms at the end of his rimes as fantastically as the snakes and monsters on the Gothic cornices and under the porches of the old cathedrals. He is less playful in this style than is Scarron, but the strong, bold colour which the latter lacks imparts to Saint-Amant's grotesque a much greater artistic value. His outline is clean and sharp after the fashion of Callot, with something of excessive and strange which gives to the figures he draws a family resemblance to the Tartaglia, the Brighelli, and the Pulchinelli of the Lorraine engraver. Van Ostade would think this interior, sketched in black and white, not unworthy of himself. It is the apartment of a debauchee. The piece is too long and too free in speech to allow us to quote it; we shall summarise its chief features in a few lines.

After having climbed high enough to lead to the belief that one has got to the third heaven into which Saint Paul was caught up, a door is reached where a rat could only get through by crawling. The room

is so cold that in mid-summer one freezes in it as in December, and a fire has to be lighted. A little rascal of a valet returns laden with faggots which he has stolen in town; but the smoke spreads through the room and makes the company shed more tears than if every one had lost all his relatives. It is in this yellow and red smoke that the poet draws up the inventory of the furniture owned by the debauchee, and there is not much of it, as will be believed. An old basket serves both as chair, footstool, and armchair, so that if one man is seated and thus saves wearing out the soles of his boots, the other stands up straight like a fir tree or a paschal candle. The broken lute-case is used alternately as a trunk and a pillow; a bottle takes the place of the candlestick; the owner's rapier is equally useful as a spit and as a knife. On the mantelpiece are to be seen heaps of ends of old pipes, a dice-box with its three dice, and the "Hours" of Robert Benière for the use of lansquenet players. As for linen, web is not lacking, but unfortunately it is cobwebs, and the rascal's whole outfit consists of a comb in a sock, — the comb itself being nothing but the backbone of a fish. As for perfumes and scented powders, it is no use looking for them there; the ashes

serve him for powder, and for pistachio he has a piece of garlic. His nails, longer than his fingers, answer the purpose of Scotch toothpicks. He has turned a pair of compasses into a curling iron, a paving stone into an andiron, and a ruff into a collar; and when he is tired — tired, not drunk — with debauch, he says good-night to the tankards, and, by merely rolling over to the left, he turns his tablecloth into a sheet and his table into a bed. The wall forms his bed-curtain, and the moon shining through a rough window, is his night-light. Nevertheless, our two epicureans enjoy in this delightful place the best meal which can be eaten between the two poles.

Undoubtedly the picture is not noble in tone, but it is painted with warmth, and those who do not exclaim, as did Louis XIV on seeing paintings by Teniers, "Take away these deformities!" will study it, I hope, with some pleasure, as well as the sketch of a similar subject, — a sonnet entitled "The Gluttons," which is full of a vivacity, a feeling and a natural touch not often met with in French poetry. The volume contains many other pieces like this one. What think you of this portrait, for instance? — You see that man who is paying his

court to the bronze King on the platform of the Pont Neuf, his owl's eyes, his pointed beard, his long nose? The crowd collects to watch him. One man thinks he is an orang-outang, another a werewolf, another an ostrich, and another, one of the camels which M. de Nevers brought home. Some say that it is a pitcher, and others a clock-hammer, which has escaped from some steeple. — It is a poet! — Would you like to know how a poet was dressed in those days? He wears a black felt hat, grown white by dint of wear, with a greasy cord around it and adorned with a cock's feather. His doublet grins at everybody and smiles at every seam. If you want to wish any one a long life, wish that he may live as long as that doublet; he will attain the age of Methuselah. A short cloak of red camlet adorns him at all seasons, winter and summer. A narrow garter, made of a piece of frieze, cuts across his vest and takes the place of a scarf. There hangs from it a foil, by way of sword, which cuts into the ground behind him as if it were the coulter of a plough. To tramp through the mud he puts on his stockingless feet a pair of old boots, one an oyster fisherman's, very broad and of black leather, the other with a white knee-piece of Russia leather; the one with a short flat

toe, the other with a twisted flap. His left heel is armed with a small spur, after the English fashion; he wears nothing on the right, save a string, somewhat like Gringoire in "Notre-Dame de Paris," which is intended to fasten the sole of the boot, ever ready to part company with the sole of his foot. As for his breeches, they are of imitation yellow satin, the one leg too long, the other too short. They are the remains of a ballet costume which some gallant gave him of yore with a quarter crown, for writing the anagram of the princess the said gallant was in love with. This is certainly a pretty poor costume, and we must hope for the honour of poetry that the colouring of the picture is somewhat exaggerated; but it is an excellent caricature and compels an involuntary laugh, like grimacing marionettes.

It is especially in "Rome Ridiculous" that his buffoon wit is most original and entertaining. It is a well deserved lesson given jokingly to enthusiastic tourists. You ought to see how he makes fun of the much vaunted Tiber, calling it a wretched little river, a barefooted river, a river of no account, which actually indulges in bridges as if they were needed to cross it. What, is that the Tiber, which one expects to see with

its crystal wave, its golden sand, a porcelain urn and a beautiful wreath of water-lilies on its head? Why, it is only a brooklet which a dwarf could walk across; a duck could use one foot only for swimming, the other would be on dry land. The golden sand is nothing but vile-smelling mud, the crystal wave a thin streamlet of dirty water, the porcelain urn an earthenware pitcher, the wreath of water-lilies a woollen cap full of holes, and the god is nothing but a porter. And the poor monuments of antiquity — how he does treat them! Never did any one speak so irreverently of them. He roars with laughter at the enthusiasm of antiquarians for heaps of shapeless stone fit only to be dens of toads and scorpions; he laughs consumedly at the Tritons of the Piazza Navone which powder their wigs with the spray of water, and which, with the jet of liquid which springs from their mouths, look more like monkeys smoking than marine divinities. And how sharply he speaks about you, beautiful Roman women! In his opinion you have no right to the reputation which your charms enjoy; you possess neither beauty, wit, nor talent. You are as dark as gipsies, greasy-haired, shapeless, big-headed, and flat-footed. Your husbands are very wrong to lock you up. There

is no need that a duenna should be constantly at your heels and should duplicate your shadow; you are quite capable of guarding yourselves, and your ugliness is a sufficient duenna. The cardinals themselves are not safe from his quizzing. He describes in the same comical fashion their great, old-fashioned coaches with the gilding worn off and drawn by thin-flanked mules, their ragged pages, and their shoeless footmen. O descendants of the wolf's whelps, how he does take you to task for your servility, your avarice, your meanness, your rascality! How he paints all your rabble which asks for tips, this one because he looked at you, the other because he said, "God bless you"! How he reproaches you for your monstrous admiration for Venus Callipyge! How he laughs at your music, at your serenades which are more discordant than an amateur concert! Hector Berlioz could not have said any more. And your great, soft felt hats with their plumes that flutter like owls preparing to take flight, your long, rusty swords, your worn velvet, your tarnished galloons! How pitilessly he lashes you! A single thing in Italy finds favour in his eyes,—it is *polenta* with cheese and Montefiascone wine.

You must confess that Saint-Amant was a man very much in advance of his age.

The inseparable friend of old Father Farré and of the pale and gloomy Bilot who blew smoke out of his nostrils, he can, when he chooses, rise to the most serious and loftiest style, as witness these lines from his "Moses":—

"The insolent barbarian, armed with an assegai still dripping with blood from many a wound, steps forth first, and with his muscular arm hurling it at Moses, touches his hair. The javelin thrown in vain hurtles past like thunder, and quivering, plunges more than a foot into the ground. The Egyptian turns pale at missing his blow, and disappointed rage in his pallor is shown. Moses, agile and firm, at once charges him, and with a steel that gleams and death foretells, dazzles him and strikes a dreadful blow, which he hears in terror whistle as it comes. He avoids it, draws back, and showing his skill, springs, sword in hand, towards the Hebrew who presses upon him. The one charges, the other guards and with the sword fends off the maddened edge which threatens him again. Sparks fly fast from the striking swords; now one stands firm, now the other struggles; and although in this fight their bodies are unarmed, they are none the less eager to assault. Both tall, both strong, they hope for victory. Eye, foot, and hand follow and unite, the arm works with the heart, the skill answers

the wish, and to take breath neither has time. Tricks and turns, surprises and feints, and all that fencing in its quickest strokes has of bold, terrible, abrupt, and cruel, is practised by each in this bitter duel. But though the pagan valiantly behaves, though skilful he appears, he cannot prevent his enemy's sword, dreadful in his sight, wounding him grievously in many a place. With pain and shame maddened, he blasphemes, grows angry, howls, and with bitter spite casting on Moses a look of wrath, strikes swiftly at his head. Moses, who watches him and who sees him lunge far from the protection of his sword, charges him, head down. The sword strikes a pine and marks it with mistaken blow. The tree, struck, cracks and trembles with horror. The pagan, astounded to find his sword has left his hand through this great effort, turns quick towards Moses and on him springing, with arms and legs at once enfolds him. Moses receives him. They clutch in desperate struggle, recall their vigour, shake each other, breathe hard and grate their teeth; their clothes they tear and their burning eyes look like rubies strange. Each tries a thousand turns, and renewing his strength, twists his foe and by him is twisted; their postures they change, with labour they burn, and the sweat with which their bodies is covered shows that every muscle, vein, and nerve is on a strain and swollen with effort. My agitated eyes see in their struggle their footprints mingling fast together on the sands. The pagan's valour begins to ebb, his strength by his wrath is in vain

sustained. He yields, and the Hebrew, ending the fight, presses him close, makes him groan, raises him, throws him down, presses with one knee his panting breast. Seeing him draw a mortal dagger, which the ardour of the fight made him forget, with one hand he seizes his weakened wrist, with the other his fingers opens; then, untwisting them, drags away the knife, turns down the point and thrice drives it up to the silver hilt, exquisitely graved, into its master's breast."

Those who care for poetry may compare this passage with that in the battle of Don Paëz and Etur de Guadarré in the "Tales of Spain and Italy." It is an interesting comparison to make on account of the similarity of action and style.

M. de Vigny would perhaps be much astonished to find in Saint-Amant the idea, thought so charming, of the tear of Christ received in a diamond urn. It is there, however, and very well developed, only it is a tear of Jocabed.

"Smarra, or The Nightmare" has been exploited by Saint-Amant as well as by Charles Nodier, and in his works are found many fantastic pieces which are equal to the strangest thing of this kind in English and in German. "Martin" alone would form a Biblical

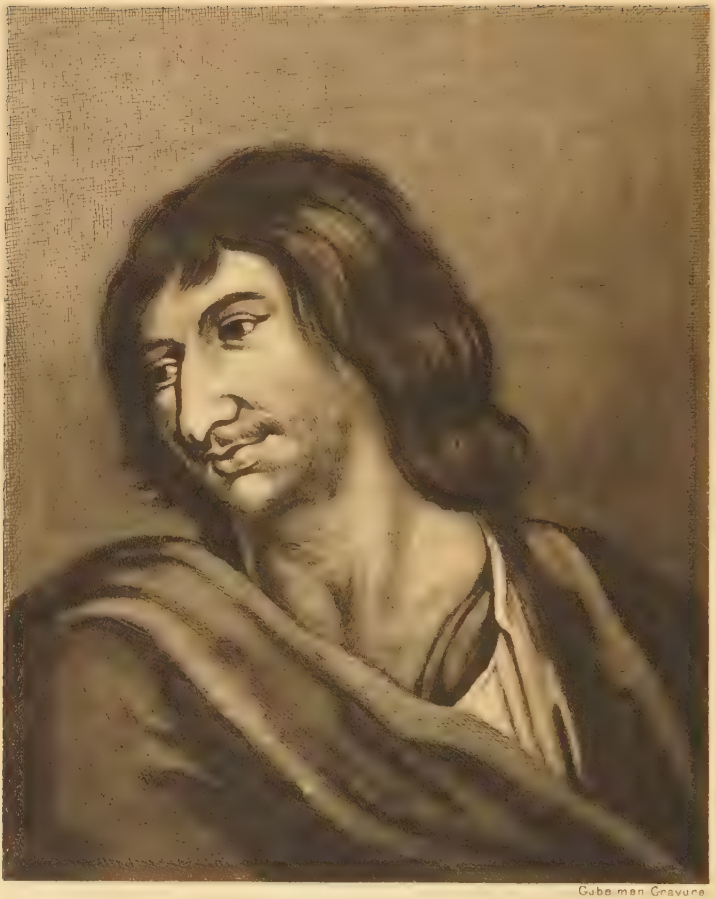
picture more dazzling than that of the bath of the Princess of Termuth: —

"She descends into the stream upon steps of agate and mother-of-pearl, between two pyramids, under a sapphire-coloured canopy. A golden grating gives passage to the silver tide in which great trees dip their boughs. She emerges from the bath, and her form is reflected from column to column on the polished porphyry like the shadow of a swan on a lake."

I think that it is enough to make us forgive Saint-Amant his famous line, —

"The fishes, amazed, behold them pass."

Cyrano de Bergerac



Cuba man Gravure

IV
CYRANO DE BERGERAC

CERTAIN physiologists pretend that they can diagnose cleverness, courage, and all the noble qualities by means of the nose, and that no one can be a great man unless he has a large nose. Many feminine physiologists also deduce from the size of that worthy part of the face a most advantageous augury. However this may be, Socrates was flat-nosed; but Socrates confesses that he was born with the most vicious tendencies, and that it was perhaps due to mere laziness on his part that he did not become a great rascal. Cæsar and Napoleon had a regular eagle's-beak in the middle of their faces; old Pierre Corneille had a highly developed nasal promontory. Look at medals and portraits, — you will find in heroes the nose proportioned to the greatness of their glory — and there are no catarrhal ones. The reason that negroes are usually stupid is not because they are flat-skulled — the skull has nothing to do with

it; it is because they are as flat-nosed as death itself. Elephants, which are endowed with so much intelligence as to make many a poet blush, are indebted for the cleverness one notices in them to the prodigious extension of their nose, for their trunk is a real nose five or six feet in length. Not so bad, is it?

This nosology may appear to be rather out of place at the beginning of a literary criticism, but on opening the first volume of Bergerac, in which is to be seen a copperplate portrait of him, the gigantic size and the strange shape of his nose so drew my attention that I have dwelt on it longer than the thing was worth, indulging in the profound reflections which have just been read, and in many others which I spare the reader.

This most extraordinary nose adorns a face seen in three-quarters, the lesser side of which is entirely covered by it. It forms in the centre a mountain which appears to me likely to be, next to the Himalayas, the highest mountain in the world. Then it dashes down towards the mouth, which it adumbrates heavily, like the trunk of a tapir or the beak of a bird of prey. At its very extremity it is divided into two parts by a line not unlike, though more marked,

that which divides the cherry lip of Anne of Austria, the fair queen with the long ivory hands. This gives the effect of two distinct noses on the same face, which is more than custom allows. Some hunting-dogs also present this peculiarity; it is a mark of great kindliness of temper. The portraits of Saint Vincent of Paul, or of the Deacon Paris, exhibit the most characteristic types of this sort of structure. Only, Cyrano's nose is less pasty, less fleshy in its contour; it is fuller of bone and of cartilage, it has more flat and more shining spots; it is more heroic. The rest of the face, so far as this splendid nose permits one to see it, struck me as being graceful and regular. The eyes are oval-shaped and very dark, which gives them surprising fire and gentleness; the eyebrows are thin, though very marked; the moustache, somewhat fine and scant, is lost in the shadow of the corners of the mouth; the hair, dressed in the most modish fashion, falls gracefully on either side of the face. But for his nose he would really be a handsome fellow. This unfortunate nose afforded Cyrano de Bergerac an opportunity of displaying his valour in duels which were repeated almost every day. If any one committed the mistake of looking at him and exhibiting the least astonishment

at the sight of such a nose, he forthwith had to appear on the ground; and as the duels of that time did not finish up with a breakfast, and Cyrano was a skilful swordsman, a man ran the risk of receiving a good sword-thrust in his belly and of coming off with his doublet adorned with more buttonholes than it had before. In a very short time, therefore, everybody agreed that the shape of Cyrano's nose was exceedingly fine, and scarce any but a yokel not yet versed in the ways of the town bethought himself of passing a joke upon it. Needless to add that a fierce lunge driven home soon taught the joker the amenities of life, if it did not lay him out dead. So far there is nothing to be said; every man is bound to have his nose respected; but Cyrano, not content with killing or grievously wounding those who did not appear satisfied with his olfactory organ, sought to establish as a principle that everybody ought to have a big nose, and that flat-nosed people were shapeless abortions, creatures scarcely more than blocked out, of whom nature was ashamed. It is in "The Trip to the Moon" that he brings forward this strange paradox. In the moon, if a flat-nosed child is born, care is taken, lest, when he grows up, he should perpetuate this abominable de-

formity, to secure him a life-long soprano voice and to fit him to enter without danger the seraglio of the Grand Seigneur. Merit is measured by the length of the nose; according to the size of the nose one is placed higher or lower. Without a nose, according to Cyrano, there can be no valour, no wit, no cleverness, no passion, nothing of what constitutes man. The nose is the abode of the soul; it forms the distinction between man and the brute, for no animal has a nose shaped like man's. Ah, Master Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac! it seems to me that you are rather too plainly exemplifying the fable of the fox that had lost its tail.

I do not know if the worth of the mind and passion depend upon the shape of the nose. The fact remains that Cyrano was valiant, clever, passionate, and that is the best proof he can give in support of his system. Of course it remains to be ascertained whether he was valiant, witty, and passionate because he had a big nose, or whether he had a big nose because he was valiant, witty, and passionate. Does the hen come from the egg, or the egg from the hen? — that is the question. Let those who are more learned than myself decide.

Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac, the owner of that

prodigious nose, was born in 1620 at the Château of Bergerac in Périgord. His father sent him to be educated by a poor country priest who took boarders and brought up, as well as he could, the sons of the country gentry. Cyrano did not make much progress under him, for he did not in the least believe in the teaching of the worthy man, whom he looked upon as a thoroughly pedantic and perfect Aristotelian ass. It was enough that his teacher should say a thing was white for Cyrano to believe that it was black, and do exactly the contrary of what he was told. It was under this man, no doubt, that he acquired that horror of pedants and of all that smacked of the college principal, which he preserved all his life, and which suggested to him so many piquant epigrams against the Sidias, whatever their gown and their colour, who seek to ascertain, like that of Théophile de Viau, *si odor in pomo est forma aut accidens.* He constantly refers to their gormandising propensity, their drunkenness, their awkwardness, their dirt, their avarice, their crass ignorance, their stupid pride, their obstinacy, to all their small, shameful vices, which partake at once of the vices of children and of old men. He describes in most spirited fashion their dirty nails, their hands unwashed since the deluge,

their greasy hair full of vermin, their snuffling noses always brown with snuff, their tone of superiority, their ways at once insolent and servile. A sketch of a Christian brother by Charlet does not surpass his in accuracy and simplicity. You may be sure that the Metaphrastes and the Pancraces of Poquelin are near relatives of the Sidiases of Théophile and of the pedants of Cyrano. They unquestionably have taught the same class in some provincial college; they have the same birch in their hand, they talk the same jargon, they all swear by Aristotle and his learned cabal. The question of knowing whether one ought to say the form or the figure of a hat is at least as good as *si odor in pomo.*

Cyrano complained so much and so frequently to his father of his master's incapacity that the former, a worthy country gentleman, who cared much more for his dogs than for his children, took him away from the priest, and careless of anything else than good living, sent the boy alone to Paris at an age when nascent passions are most to be feared, especially in highly strung natures like that of young Savinien.

What was to be expected happened, — Bergerac was carried away with the stream of the mad and turbulent

youth of that day. He gave himself up to debauch with the ardour of a lad of eighteen, who sees Paris for the first time and who has come from out a little country presbytery, from a quiet, discreet house, sober, methodical, and silent, almost always half asleep under the shadow of its grey walnut-trees between the church and the graveyard, ruled by a doting priest and a blear-eyed, grumbling servant. Wine and women, those two delightful things which smile so sweetly upon our young fancies, very nearly wrecked him completely on leaving this life of discipline and self-mastery. It was the days of those handsome Spanish and Italian adventuresses, proud, voluptuous creatures, who loved with equal passion gold, blood, and perfumes, pale as amber, supple as the willow, strong as steel, with slightly arched noses, with lips disdainfully turned up at the corners and seeming to scorn, eyes moist and flashing, hair thick and wavy, almost regal hands full of dimples, slender fingers whiter than the ivory of their fans. It was the heyday of the beautiful, poetic courtesan, the day when balconies were scaled, the day of silken ladders and ballets and masquerades, of that Spanish gallantry at once grave and extravagant, so devoted that it was actually stupid, so ardent that it

turned to ferocity, the days of sonnets and society verses, of great sword-thrusts, deep draughts, and frightful gambling. Men threw their lives away, scattered their souls to every wind as though they knew not what to do with them; every minute they staked their existence on the cast of a die; they fought on their own account; they served as seconds to others rather than remain with their arms crossed. A man looked at you — forthwith a duel; somebody did not look at you — another duel; one man insulted you, another despised you; and all that without braggadocio, with an admirable, free and easy nonchalance, as if it were merely a question of draining a glass of hippocras. What a waste of courage! The making of a hundred thousand heroes scattered at the corners of squares at night under some lantern.

Cyrano managed to be called "the Intrepid" by a society thus constituted; he, still a youth, just arrived from Périgord, fresh from the home of a poor country priest! It was a splendid start.

It was already the fashion to pretend to be impious and strong-minded. I will not affirm that Cyrano indulged in this ridicule; nevertheless, he was accused of it, like most of the wits of the day. What served

to support this accusation were some passages of his tragedy of "Agrippina," in which atheistic maxims like the following are openly and vigorously expressed: —

Terentius. And yet thou knowest Rome is monarchical,
That aristocratic now it can no more remain,
And that the Roman eagle will find it hard to soar
When more than one master it has to upbear.
Respect and fear the dread thunder of the gods.
Sejanus. The bolt in winter never strikes the earth;
So for six months at least I may laugh at gods;
When these are past, I make my peace with heav'n.
Terentius. All thy projects the gods shall overthrow.
Sejanus. A little smoking incense atones for many deeds.
Terentius. Who fears them —
Sejanus. Fears naught. These creatures of terror,
These splendid nothings men ignorantly adore,
Thirsting for the blood of animals slain,
These gods whom man has made, who made not man,
These absurd upholders of the strongest states, —
I tell you, Terentius, who fears them, fears naught.
Terentius. But if they existed not, could this great globe —
Sejanus. Nay, if they did exist, would I still live? —

And this other passage in which the immortality of the soul is denied: —

Agrippina. You are then proof to a sight so sad?
Sejanus. 'T is only death, and no wise moves me.

Agrippina. But the uncertainty as to what is after death —
Sejanus. Was I unhappy before I ever was?
One hour after death the vanished soul
Shall be what it was an hour ere life.

But all this proves nothing. It is not the poet who says these things; they are spoken by the characters whom he has put on the stage, a distinction which it is easy to make and which people never will make, I know not why. In the same way most thoroughly zealous Christians who had just communicated at Easter, and had carefully abstained from eating meat on Fridays and Saturdays, have been accused of irreligion and atheism. Evil-mindedness profits by all this. A few verses treacherously separated from the context are quoted, and forthwith an honest man, true-hearted and a genius, is proclaimed an atheist and a free-thinker by obscure pedants who ought to have a whole alphabet branded on their shoulders, and who, from the mud in which they lie, never cease to croak at every renown, filling in literature the office of the sworn insulters of the Roman triumphs. Cyrano has put the maxims I have quoted in the mouth of Sejanus, a scoundrel rotten with vice, one of those monstrous colossi of infamy who terrified the world in the days of

the Roman decadence. It is quite natural that he should speak thus; atheism is but a trifle to such a man. Besides, he is a pagan, and the gods he insults are but demons, according to all the fathers of the Church. To maintain that there are no gods is thoroughly orthodox, and it seems to me strange that a Christian poet should be accused of atheism because he makes a pagan deny the divinity of Jupiter. It is one more anomaly to be added to the immense repertory of the eccentricities of the human mind. Besides, it has always been so. Byron takes for the heroes of his poems corsairs and murderers; so people insist that he himself is a murderer and a vampire. There are many men who are not yet quite certain that the author of "Han d'Islande" and of the "Condemned Man's Last Day" did not eat human flesh and did not die on the scaffold. This method of attributing to the poet what he makes his creations say would involve hanging high all tragic poets, for they have committed more murders, poisonings, rapes, and adulteries, they have done more cruel, impious, and rascally things than the most abominable wretches in the world, and in this respect the Classicists, in spite of that most gentle horror of blood which they exhibit on the production

of every new play, have not the least right to accuse the Romanticists. In order to give an idea of the intelligence of the cabal formed against Cyrano, it will be sufficient to relate this trait, which is worthy of a modern cabal: — Some worthy townsmen, dolts of that day, went to a performance of "Agrippina," perfectly convinced that unless they caused it to fail, the whole social structure would infallibly be destroyed. They allowed all the scandalous passages to pass because they did not understand them, and they looked at each other with their big frog's-eyes and twisted their hats between their fingers with a rather dismayed look, awaiting the signal to hiss; but when Sejanus, having made up his mind to murder Tiberius, says, "Come, let us strike the host!" the boors began to yell and hiss like asps, and to call aloud, "Ah, the poetaster! the beast! the wicked man! the atheist! the Huguenot! Just hear how he speaks of the Blessed Sacrament! Come, let him be burned without loss of time."

In spite of these pious suggestions, Bergerac was not burned alive; the days of Stephen Dolet had gone by. But many have perished at the pile for no better a reason, for just as trifling a motive. Théophile de Viau,

as you are aware, was executed in effigy, and spent long years in prison.

Oh, man, the only animal that looks up to heaven, I really do not know how you came not to walk on all-fours!

Cyrano met in Paris a comrade of his who had been a schoolmate with him at the worthy country priest's, and who thereafter became his most intimate friend. He was called Le Bret. He was serving in the regiment of the Guards, in the company commanded by M. de Carbon Castel-Jaloux. He forced (he says so himself) our young debauchee to enter it with the rank of cadet. Cyrano soon brought himself to notice by his boldness and his skill with the sword. Duels at that time were considered the readiest, and indeed the only way of showing one's courage. He drew attention so very much to himself and in so very few days, thanks to the number of encounters which he had and the fashion in which he came out of them, that in this regiment, composed almost exclusively of Gascons, he was thereafter known as "the Demon of Bravery;" and in spite of the little trust usually placed in the hyperboles of the children of the Garonne, no one, this time, thought the nickname at all exaggerated, and it

stuck to him during the rest of his life. He literally counted his days by his combats, and even counted more combats than days, despatching sometimes two or three affairs of the sort in a single morning. It was not only in duels that he gained this reputation for intrepidity, but in more general affairs, of which I shall relate one which appears almost fabulous, which brought him a great deal of honour and gave him a very good position at court and in the town. It reads like one of those old romances of chivalry full of great sword-strokes that cut giants down to the belt. It was by the moat of the gate of Nesle that this battle, worthy of the Cid Campeador, took place. Cyrano was with one of his friends. A body of one hundred men — here one hundred men does not mean many men, but one hundred individuals — struck and insulted him. He drew his sword without being in the least degree terrified by their number, dashed upon them, laid out a couple of them on the spot, wounded seven others so severely that they never recovered, and drove the rest before him like a flock. This encounter won him the more glory that it was his friend and not he who had been insulted; and it must be said in Cyrano's honour that he was ardent and prompt to serve those whom

he loved, that he had not very many quarrels on his own account, and that it was rather as a second that he fought than for himself. M. de Bourgogne, colonel of the Prince of Conti's infantry regiment, and several other noblemen no less distinguished as experts in matters of bravery, witnessed this superhuman battle and spoke most highly of it in society. The illustrious Cavois, Brissailles, an ensign in the guards of his Royal Highness, M. de Zedde, M. Duret de Montchenin, one of the bravest of men, who served him and were served by him on some occasions permissible at that time to people of their profession, praised his courage as being equal to that of the most valiant of men.

We have dwelt much upon the audacity and rashness of Cyrano, first, because since the days of Horace, and even earlier, poets have acquired a thoroughly well deserved reputation for cowardice, and we are very glad therefore to find one who is brave and manly in spite of his being a poet; next, because his audacity and rashness did not forsake Cyrano when he laid aside the sword for the pen. The same characteristic of extravagant and witty boldness is met with in all his work; in every sentence he is fighting with reason. Reason in vain stands on guard and holds itself well behind the

hilt of its rapier; fantasy has always in reserve some secret thrust with which it pierces her and stretches her out on the sward. In less than a minute, like Capitan Chasteaufort, it has advanced and retreated, surprised the forte of the blade, cut under the arm, marked every beat, used a flanconnade, thrust under; it has lunged in tierce under the sword, in carte over the left foot, feinted inside and outside, cut and slashed, shaken, gained ground, engaged, volted, parried, made the riposte, carted, passed, and killed, not more than thirty men, but more than thirty really new and philosophical ideas. The thrusts our gentleman makes use of are exaggerated metaphors, over-refined comparisons, plays upon words, quibbles, conundrums, conceits, witticisms, low jests, far-fetched preciosity, the quintessence of sentiment, — whatever, in a word, is excessive in the bad taste of Spain, ingenious and flashy in the Italian, cold and mannered in the French. Of course, unhappy reason cannot often have the better of such an adversary; nevertheless it sometimes issues victorious from this unequal duel, and one regrets that it does not oftener have the advantage over its fantastic enemy.

For the rest, Cyrano belongs thoroughly to his age. The mad audacity which marks both his thoughts and

his acts was not uncommon at that time. The Matamore, or hectoring bully, a delightful type which has vanished from our comedies, just as the types of the Scapins and the Lisettes are going to vanish, or have vanished as I write, was in reality but a slightly overdrawn portrait. There were plenty of these nose-slitters with turned up moustachioes, shoulders well back, chests well out, cloak thrown over the shoulder, broad-brimmed hat pulled down over the eyes, legs like compasses, armed with a rapier as long as a day of starvation, who fought with those who trod on their shadow, scattered troops of horse by the mere wind of their sword-cut, and sent word to humankind not to dare to be alive three days hence under pain of having to do with them. Listen to the Hector of the stage: —

"Who are the rascals who are making a noise yonder? — If I come down, I will let loose the Fates. Do you not know that in these hours of stillness I order everything to be silent save my renown? Do you not know that my sword is made of one half of the shears of Atropos? Do you not know that when I come in it is by a breach; when I emerge it is from battle? — that when I ascend it is to a throne; when I descend it is to the duelling-ground? — that if I lie

down, that means a man laid out; if I go forward, I am conquering; if I draw back, it is to spring forward better; if I play, it is at spoil the king; that if I win, it is a battle; that if I lose, it is my enemies; if I write, it is a challenge; if I read, it is a sentence of death; finally if I speak, it is by the mouth of a gun?"

And now listen to the city Hector: —

"Well, my stout man, I have at last seen you. My eyes have travelled at great length upon you, but as I am not everybody, permit me to hand down your portrait to posterity, which one day will be very glad to know what manner of man you were. First, then, it shall be known that nature, which stuck a head on your chest, expressly refrained from putting a neck to it so as to guarantee it against the evil prognostications of your horoscope; that your soul is so gross that it might well serve as a body to a somewhat slim person; that you have what in men is called the face so very much below the shoulders that you look like Saint Denis carrying his head in his hands. But good heavens! What do I see? You appear to me to be more swelled even than usual. Your legs and your head are already so closely bound by their extension to the circumference

of the globe that you are, that you are nothing but a balloon. Perhaps you fancy that I am making fun of you. You are right. I will even assure you that if the blows of a stick could be seen like writing, you could read my letter with your shoulders. Be not astonished at my way of proceeding, for the vast extent of your stoutness makes me incline so much to the belief that you are an earth that I would willingly plant wood upon you to see how it would fare. Think you that because a man cannot thrash the whole of you in twenty-four hours and can compass but one of your shoulder-blades in a single day, I propose to intrust the care of your death to the executioner? Oh, no, I shall myself be your death, and you would be already done for were I only free from an affection of the spleen, for the cure of which the doctors have ordered me to take some four or five pinches more of your impertinence; but as soon as I shall have exhausted diversions and shall be tired of laughing, you may be certain that I shall send you word forbidding you to reckon yourself among living things."

The man who speaks thus is no other than our hero, Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac, who has quite the manners and the style of Captain Fracasse; and the one

whom he is thus addressing is Montfleury the actor, of the Hôtel de Bourgogne. Molière, in "The Versailles Impromptu," in the scene where he takes off the actors of the rival troupe, also alludes to the hippopotamus-like size of Montfleury: —

"And who is it that plays the parts of kings with you?"

"Here is an actor who occasionally takes them."

"What, that well made young fellow? You are joking. You must have a king stout and fat enough for four people; a king, by Jove! who has a proper size of corporation, a king of vast circumference, who can fill a throne suitably. A pretty object a king of handsome figure would be!"

Let it not be supposed that this is merely a joke. The actor who had thus been warned, having dared to appear on the stage, Cyrano shouted to him, from the centre of the pit, to withdraw, else he might make his will and consider himself dead. Montfleury, who knew very well that he was a man to do just what he said, obeyed at once, and it was only a month later that our swashbuckler allowed him to return to the stage and to continue to bellow with his bull voice the lines ascribed to kings and tyrants.

This prank was no doubt prompted by some dispute which had occurred between the poet and the actor dur-

ing the rehearsals of "Agrippina;" perhaps also it was mere caprice.

Cyrano, being at the siege of Mousson, received a musket wound in the body, and later, at the siege of Arras in 1640, a sword-thrust in the throat. He was then twenty. He began early, and many a brave soldier serves all his life without being lucky enough to be as honourably wounded. Nevertheless, the incommodity caused by these two serious wounds, the frequency of the duels which his reputation brought him, the privations which he had had to endure during these two campaigns, his love of study, his independent spirit, and the little hope he had of promotion — for he had no patron — combined to disgust him with the service. He abandoned wholly the profession of war, which requires a man to give himself up to it completely and leaves him no freedom of mind or action. Marshal Gassion, who liked brave and clever men, had indeed sought to attach him to himself, on the reports which had been made to him of Cyrano's fight at the Nesle gate; but Cyrano, in spite of the solicitations of his friends, had not accepted these advances, so much did he fear that his gratitude would compromise his liberty. He was naturally a very disinterested man, and besides

cared as little as may be for the people of his day, and did not think that the servitude consequent on familiarity with and the patronage of the great was sufficiently compensated for by the favours and advancement which might result therefrom. This temper of his made him neglect some very useful acquaintances, whom the reverend Mother Marguerite, who held him in very special esteem, wished to have him make and cultivate. However, in order to satisfy his friends, he consented to have a patron at court, and chose the Duke of Arpajon, to whom he dedicated his works. This nobleman's protection was not of much use to him; Cyrano, indeed, complains of having been abandoned by him during his illness, and had no reason to be satisfied with him in any way. Nevertheless, he remained with him until the night when, returning from the Duke's mansion, he was struck on the head by a piece of wood thrown down inadvertently. This wound caused his death, which occurred in the country, at the home of his cousin de Cyrano, whose conversation he was very fond of, and to whose house — through a fancy for a change of air which precedes death and which is an almost certain symptom of it with nearly all patients — he was carried five days only before he gave up the

ghost. His death happened in 1655. Cyrano was then thirty-five years old. He died like a Christian, having long since given up wine and women, and confined himself to excessively simple food.

Cyrano's character was very amiable and bright, and his conversation abounded in witty sallies. He therefore had many close connections and friendships, and was fortunate enough to be beloved by every one up to the day of his death, and even after it by a few. Besides his childhood's friend, Le Bret, he had most pleasant intercourse with many others, all brave, clever, or well-born men, such as de Prade, who was at once a poet, a brave man, and a scholar; M. de Chavagne, who always hastened to meet those whom he desired to oblige with such pleasant impetuosity; the illustrious councillor de Longueville-Gontier, who had every quality that makes a perfect man; de Saint-Gilles, in whom the deed always followed the desire to do service; de Lignière, whose work gives proof of such exquisitely fine inspiration; de Châteaufort, endowed with admirable memory and judgment, and who so happily applied the numberless fine things he knew; des Billettes, who at twenty-three knew everything that others are proud to know at fifty; de la

Morlière, whose manners were so fine and who apologised in such charming fashion; the Count of Brienne, whose wit corresponded so well to his high birth; and the Abbé of Villeloin, so learned, and producing indefatigably so many good and useful works. This enumeration must also include the famous mathematician Rohaut, who thought highly of Cyrano and bore him much friendship; Molière, who prized his talents sufficiently to rob him of one of his best scenes; and Gassendi, who consented to admit him to his lessons, by which he profited. Gassendi, who was the preceptor of Chapelle, had also Molière and Bernier for pupils, lucky teacher that he was!

The right of great geniuses to take their property where they find it has been much discussed recently, and a great deal of nonsense talked about it. It has been said that it is not robbing, but conquering. Ennius's dung-hill has been quoted, the pearls in which belonged by right to any Virgil that was ready to take them. It has been claimed that it was doing much honour to poor Ennius that Virgil should take the trouble to polish, to set, and to flash in the eyes of people the rough gems hidden in Ennius's mud; that such robbing was really rather creation; only this con-

dition was insisted upon, that the robbed should also be murdered — which is nice literary morality. All that is very pleasant and convenient for barren brains, and I am not surprised that such a paradox has found defenders; but, whatever versemakers may say, I am fully of Cyrano's opinion, that penalties more rigorous than those decreed against highway robbers should be established for plagiarists, because, glory being more precious than a horse, a coat, or even than gold, those who acquire it through books which they compose out of what they have stolen from others are like thieves who dress themselves at the expense of those whom they have robbed; and if each one had liberty to say only what had not been said, libraries would be less large, less embarrassing and more useful, and man's life, although very short, would be almost sufficient to read and know every good thing, while, as it is, in order to find one passable thing it is necessary to read a hundred thousand that are worthless or that have been read elsewhere many a time, — which is a useless and unpleasant expenditure of time.

We do not mean to say, however, that a writer should not draw inspiration from the works of the masters in general, or from that one of the masters

with whose talent he has most secret affinity. It would be very much as if it were to be insisted upon that any man who follows an art or a science should have little by little intuitively divined the principles for himself. That would be unreasonable. Every one is entitled to profit by the master's experience, to start from the point which he has reached, to make use of his processes and his way of expressing himself; but to no more than this. To take a figure, a word, a sentence, a page, is just as much stealing as picking a pocket, and to call it by another name implies a very high state of civilisation.

You have doubtless heard that the galley scene in "The Tricks of Scapin" was imitated from Cyrano de Bergerac, but it is not likely that you took the trouble to look it up where it is — in "The Tricked Pedant." Now read what follows, and in spite of all the respect due to the great Molière, tell me if it is not the most barefaced plagiarism possible. Besides, this is not the only plagiarism which Molière is chargeable with. If the old sketches of plays and the Italian writers of tales, such as the "Facetious Nights" of Signor Straparola, for instance, were examined, the master of the French stage would be found to have a very small

share of invention; nor would Shakespeare be much better off. A very singular fact, which the investigations of science daily establish more clearly, is that the men whom it has been agreed to call geniuses have, properly speaking, invented nothing, and that all their invention and their ideas are generally found in the works of mediocre, obscure, or wretched authors. What is the cause of the difference, then? Style and character, which after all are the only things that constitute the great artist; for everybody may invent a poetic incident or idea, but very few are capable of carrying it out and expressing it so as to be understood of others. Here is the scene from "The Tricked Pedant": —

Corbinelli (Scapin). Alas! All is lost! Your son is dead.

Granger (Géronte). My son dead? Are you mad?

Corbinelli. No, I am quite serious. Your son, in truth, is not dead, but he has fallen into the hands of the Turks.

Granger. Into the hands of the Turks! Support me, — I expire.

Corbinelli. Scarcely had we entered the boat to cross over from the gate of Nesle to the University quay —

Granger. And what were you going to do at the University, you ass?

Corbinelli. My master, remembering the order you gave him to purchase some trifle rare in Venice and not very costly in Paris to present to his uncle, thought that a dozen bundles of wood being cheap, and there being none in Europe as pretty as those made here, he had better take some to Venice. That is why we were going to the University — to buy some. But scarcely had we left the bank behind us, when we were taken by a Turkish galley.

Granger. Yet, by the twisted trumpet of Triton, the marine god, who ever heard it said that Saint-Cloud was on the sea, and that there were galleys, pirates, and reefs there ?

Corbinelli. That is what makes the thing still more remarkable. And although they have not been seen in France save in that one spot, who knows whether they did not come here from Constantinople between two tides ?

Paquier. Yes, indeed, sir, for the Topinambous, who live four or five hundred leagues beyond the earth, once came to Paris, and only the other day the Poles carried off the Princess Mary in broad daylight from Nevers House, without any one daring to oppose them.

Corbinelli. But they were not satisfied with that, — they proposed to stab your son to death —

Paquier. What ! Before he could confess ?

Corbinelli. Unless he gave money for his ransom.

Granger. Ah, the wretches ! That was done to instil fear into his young breast.

Paquier. That is right. The Turks are very careful not to take Christian money, because it bears a cross.

Corbinelli. My master could find nothing to say but, "Go and find my father and tell him —" His tears, forthwith choking his speech, told me better than he could have done himself of the affection he bears to you.

Granger. But what the devil was he doing in a Turk's galley? A Turk's! Perge!

Corbinelli. These pitiless pirates would not have granted me leave to come and find you, if I had not cast myself at the knees of the one who appeared to be the most important among them. Oh, Mr. Turk, — I said to him, — allow me to go and inform his father, who will straightway send you a ransom.

Granger. You ought not to have spoken of ransom. They must have made fun of you.

Corbinelli. On the contrary, on hearing the word "ransom" he became more peaceful. "Go," he said to me, "but if you are not back shortly, I shall fetch your master out of his college, and I shall hang the whole three of you at our ship's yard-arm." I was so afraid of hearing anything worse, or that the devil should carry me off, because I was in company with these excommunicated people that I promptly sprang into a skiff to come and inform you of the dreadful particulars of this affair.

Granger. What the devil was he doing in a Turk's galley?

Paquier. And it is some ten years perhaps since he went to confession!

Granger. But do you think he has quite made up his mind to go to Venice?

Corbinelli. He thinks of nothing else.

Granger. Well, the evil may yet be cured. Paquier, give me the receptacle of the instruments of immorality. *Scriptorium scilicet.*

Corbinelli. What do you propose to do with them?

Granger. To write a letter to that Turk.

Corbinelli. To what purpose?

Granger. To tell them to send me back my son, because I want him. Besides, they must excuse youth, which is subject to many errors; and if he allows himself to be caught again, I promise them, on the word of a doctor, no longer to weary their ears about him.

Corbinelli. They will laugh at you, by my faith.

Granger. Go and tell them this from me: that I am ready to bind myself before a notary to return without a ransom the very first one of their company who may fall into my hands. The devil! What the devil was he going to do in that galley? Or tell them that if they do not send him back, I shall go and complain to the courts. As soon as they have set him at liberty, waste no time in returning, for I need you both.

Corbinelli. All that is sheer nonsense.

Granger. Good heavens! And am I to be ruined at my

age? Go with Paquier. Take what is left of the money which I gave you for expenses only a week ago (to go into a galley without any purpose!); take the change of that coin. Ah, you wretched son of mine! you cost me more gold than you weigh. Pay the ransom, and what is left, use it for pious purposes. In a Turk's galley! Well, that will do. Be off. And here, you wretch, tell me what the devil he was going to do in that galley! Go, and fetch from my cupboard that worn doublet which my father gave up wearing in the year of the great winter.

Corbinelli. What is the good of all this nonsense? You must come to the point. His ransom will take at least a hundred pistoles.

Granger. A hundred pistoles! Ah, my son, would I could give my life to preserve yours! A hundred pistoles! Corbinelli, go and tell him to let himself be made a prisoner without a word. But he is not to be downcast, for I shall make them repent it.

Corbinelli. Miss Genevotte was no fool when she refused a while ago to marry you because she was assured that you were quite capable, if she happened to be a slave in Turkey, of leaving her there.

Granger. I shall prove them liars. To go off in a Turk's galley! By all the devils in hell, what was he going to do in that galley? Oh, galley, galley! You have put my purse in the galleys.

Paquier. That is what comes of going to galleys! Who

the devil urged him to do it? If he had had the patience to wait another week, the king might have sent him to the galleys in such good company that the Turks would not have taken him.

Corbinelli. Our dominie forgets that the Turks will eat him up.

Paquier. You are quite safe, as far as that goes. Mohammedans do not eat pig.

Granger. There, be off with you. Take all my worldly goods!

Do you not think that this is abusing very strangely the privilege of a man of genius? And this scene is not the only one which Molière took from Cyrano. That most amusing scene in "The Tricks of Scapin," in which the lively Zerbinette tells Géronte of the stratagem which has been made use of to draw money from him is in full in that same "Tricked Pedant." It is copied even more closely than the other, and every part of it is to be found there, even the endless "ha ha!" and "he he!" of the adventuress. I know not what the Granier-Cassagnacs of that day have said about it. "The Tricked Pedant" is remarkable, among other peculiarities, as being the first comedy written in prose, and the first in which a peasant speaks in his own dialect. It is not the

only thing that men of great reputation have borrowed from the obscure Cyrano de Bergerac. His "Trip to the Moon," and his comic "History of the States, Empires of the Sun," suggested to Fontenelle the idea of his "Worlds," to Voltaire that of "Micromégas," to Swift that of "Gulliver," and perhaps to Montgolfier the idea of the balloon. For among other means of reaching the moon or the sun, Cyrano mentions this one, to wit: "to fill a hollow and very thin globe with a very subtle air or smoke of weight less than that of the atmosphere." That suggestion made, there is not much left to be done, and the real inventor of the balloon is, in my opinion, Cyrano de Bergerac, and not any one else. Amid the ingenious paradoxes and the most far-fetched, philosophical ideas, amid the exaggerations of the most frantic and adventurous genius, it is easy to see that Cyrano was acquainted with the exact sciences, and that he knew physics perfectly, and Descartes' system from beginning to end. He had also written a "History of the Spark," in which, in the same fashion that he proved that the moon is inhabitable, he proved that stones feel, that plants are endowed with instinct and brutes with reasoning powers; but a thief ransacked his box while he was

ill, and unfortunately that history has never been found. If we are to believe his friend, M. Le Bret, it was superior to all his other works, and he bitterly deplores its loss.

The works of Cyrano consist, first, of a collection of letters on different subjects. These letters are a sort of amplification, in which the quaintness of the style rivals the novelty of the ideas. They are written in the most highly developed euphuistic style, but they are full of brilliancy, and of prodigious fertility of invention. They are his *juvenilia* and the first performances of his pen. Next, "The Tricked Pedant," a comedy in five acts, in prose; "The Death of Agrippina," a tragedy in a much more serious tone than the rest of his works, written in verse of a vigour equal to Corneille's, and in which there are many passages which approach the sublime irony of "Nicomedes." The following extract may serve as a sample: —

Tiberias. My son's wife conspiring against me!
Livilla. Yes, I, wife to thy son, daughter to thy brother,
Was about to stab thee, my uncle and father.
To unite a hundred crimes in one, I would have the renown
Of committing a deed for which there is no name.

I, your niece, daughter-in-law, cousin, daughter,
I, bound to you by all family ties,
I wished to profane with the stroke of my vengeance
Every degree of relationship and of connection
To violate in your breast both nature and law,
I alone cause all your relatives to rebel,
And show that a tyrant in his own family
May find an executioner, though he have but a daughter.
I have slain my husband, and would have done worse,
So that I might no longer be wife to your son ;
For I had admitted your son to my couch
Only, through my children, to be mistress of your race,
And all your blood to shed as I pleased
Once it was compelled to pass through my breast.

Finally, "The Trip to the Moon," — the first part of which, wherein are expressed divers conjectures upon what the little night-sun may really be, is in some respects marvellously like the famous "Ballad of the Dot on the I," — and the "Comic History of the Sun."

Although quite young, and notwithstanding his lack of taste, Cyrano by dint of fire, boldness, and wit, had almost found favour with Boileau, who said of him, —

"I prefer Bergerac and his burlesque boldness
To the verses in which Motin labours and is cold."

These two verses have done more to make him known than all that he has written himself. Just see what human fortune is, and how difficult it is to be a man of genius! For if a man of genius means an inventor, a man who is original both in matter and expression, no one on earth is so well entitled to the appellation as Cyrano de Bergerac; and yet no one thinks of him save as an ingenious and amusing madman.

George de Scudéry

V

GEORGE DE SCUDÉRY

SCUDÉRY is unquestionably a very wretched poet, and an equally wretched prose-writer. He thoroughly deserves the forgetfulness into which he has sunk, and it is difficult to come across a more colossal and indigestible lot of nonsense than his collected works. Only men accustomed to that kind of research can have any idea of the determined courage required to enable one to read such monotonous trash. When I remember that I have read from beginning to end "Alaric, or Rome Conquered," it makes me shudder. An epic poem in ten cantos, which has at most eleven thousand verses, as says in the preface, and in the most free and easy fashion, that great braggart, George de Scudéry. The one thing that somewhat consoles me for the trouble I have taken is that I am the only man who in this year of our Lord 1843 has read an epic poem through, — and that is no slight satisfaction. However, weari-

some as are poets of this sort, I confess that I prefer them to those of our day whom it is the fashion to praise. I prefer a barbarous and ridiculous poem like "Alaric," for instance, which is full of incongruous and amusing inventions, to those wretched translations and paraphrases of Greek and Latin authors which are so awkwardly made and which lack the understanding of antiquity which inspires the verses of that time. Besides, Scudéry is a splendid type of a class of writers now vanished, and it is for this reason that I have taken him up. He is the braggart, the boaster, the Captain Fracasse, the Chasteaufort of the sacred vale, a true laurel chewer, who cuts his pen with his rapier and seems in every sentence to challenge his reader. In this respect he is somewhat related to Cyrano, but there are several essential differences between them. The first, which suffices to open a gulf between them, is that Bergerac was a man of prodigious wit; the second is that scarce a day passed that Bergerac did not go on the ground, and that he carried into action all his rodomontades. In Scudéry there runs through his swashbuckler character a vein of pedantry and ill-breeding which is not found in Cyrano. Scudéry is more shiny about the seams, hungrier, dirtier, more

ridiculous, — more a man of letters, in a word, — than the author of the "Trip to the Moon," and I do not think that Molière stole anything from him.

This literary Hector was born about 1601 at Havre, where his father was king's lieutenant. He belonged to Apt in Provence, and it was there that he spent his earliest years; there also that he made the acquaintance of young Catherine de Rouyère, whom he fell in love with. The first verses of his which we possess were written for this lady. It is always the way: at the bottom of any poet's vocation, whether he be a good one or a bad one, there is love for some woman. It is easily understood. The poet, however classical he may be, requires a more accessible and less vaporous muse than one of the nine old maids perched on double-headed Parnassus.

George at first embraced the profession of arms and served in the regiment of French Guards; then, wearying of that business, he began to work for the stage. He made his début with "Lygdamon and Lydias, or the Likeness." It is a tragi-comedy, neither worse nor better than the tragi-comedies written at that time. At the beginning there is a rather pretty scene, from which we shall make a few extracts. The subject is

drawn from Honoré d'Urfé's novel "Astræa," the fashionable novel of the day, from which more plays were then extracted than are now drawn from the tales of M. Michel Masson. Next he produced "The Deceiver Punished" and many other plays up to the number of sixteen between the years 1631 and 1644.

Lygdamon, Sylvia's rejected lover, opens the scene with a monologue, in which he discusses the important question whether he shall end his sad existence by means of a rapier or a sword, whether he shall throw himself from a rock or drown himself; whereupon comes in fair Sylvia, very thoughtful and preoccupied.

Lygdamon. This time I have caught you dreaming.

Sylvia. The enamel of the flowers alone entertained me. I was dreaming like those whose minds are blank.

Lygdamon. Your complexion, which I worship, is of finer roses,
And your mind works only upon great things.

Sylvia. It is true; I admire the height of these trees.

Lygdamon. Admire my love, greater a thousand times.

Sylvia. How agreeable is the shade of this dark forest!

Lygdamon. That is where your coldness is preserved, by the shade.

Sylvia. I have never seen anything so fair as the skies.

Lygdamon. What! does your mirror not reflect your eyes?

Sylvia. How charming is the sound of this purling brook !

Lygdamon. Can you behold it without thinking of my tears ?

Sylvia. Cooling zephyrs I seek within these meads.

Lygdamon. You owe that pleasure to the breath of my sighs.

Sylvia. How numberless the herbs and blooms that diaper these swards !

Lygdamon. Their number is less than that of my pains.

Sylvia. Carnations and lilies blend together here.

Lygdamon. Ay, on your face, but on my own marigolds.

Sylvia. How many different roads pierce the surrounding woods !

Lygdamon. There are as many crosses to my love.

Sylvia. That little butterfly never leaves me.

Lygdamon. So does my heart accompany your steps.

Sylvia. How sweet to my ears is the song of the birds ! What tones and harmonies ! List to the marvel !

Lygdamon. Alas, fair Sylvia ! a god makes them sing From whom you fly so you may not content me.

Sylvia. I beg you, Lygdamon, make me to know him.

Lygdamon. So you know not what you give birth to ?

Sylvia. I am chaste, and no child have borne as yet.

Lygdamon. Yes, you have.

Sylvia. Name him.

Lygdamon. By all called Love.

For a man who was but now about to kill himself, this is surely lively and witty enough. No doubt the wit is somewhat far-fetched, but the motive of the

scene is quite poetic. The lover who holds to his one idea, spite of all the indifferent things which his mistress talks of to prevent his speaking of his love for her, and who succeeds in fitting to his design the very expressions which are to draw him away from it, — such a lover is an ingenious find.

If we are to believe the author, this tragi-comedy was most successful. "Lygdamon, which I wrote on leaving the Guards, and in my first youth, met with a success which surpassed both my hopes and its merits. It was performed thrice running before the whole court at Fontainebleau, and whether that illustrious society excused a soldier's mistakes, or accounted these mistakes pleasant sins, this much is certain, that the points touched a hundred illustrious hearts, and that having praised highly a thing which was little worthy of it," etc. Our Hector continues at some length in this fashion and praises all his plays, one after another, with the most admirable effrontery. "We now come at last," he says, "to that blessed disguised prince who so long delighted and charmed the whole court. Never did a work of this sort create so great a sensation, and never did a violent work last so long. The men all went to see the play wherever it was per-

formed, the women all knew its stanzas by heart, and there are yet to be met with many of the best people who maintain that I have never done anything finer, so greatly did this sham enchanter enchant everybody."

Every one of his plays has its own particular merit: one has drawn tears over and over again, not only from the eyes of the common people, but from the fairest eyes in the world; another would have been no less successful if the actor who played the leading part had not died; a third did not succeed very well, but when published it attained the popularity which had been counted on for it on the stage; a fourth suffered somewhat from the mischance of antagonistic constellations; however diverting it was and however fine the subject, it was but faintly praised; on the other hand, "Love the Tyrant," which came immediately afterwards, fully compensated for this slight check, for the whole court and with it the whole of France spoke in such eulogious fashion of this work that George de Scudéry, modest and shy writer that he is, dares not reproduce what was said, so laudatory and glorious was it. "As for the great 'Arminius,' it is my masterpiece that I offer you in this play, the most highly praised work that ever came from my pen; for whether we consider

the story, the manners, the sentiments, or the versification, it is certain that I have never done anything greater, more beautiful, or more exact; and if my labours could have deserved a crown, it is upon this last work only that I would found my claim. Therefore it is with this poem that I close the series of my writings of this kind, and henceforth you shall have no more such from me unless the sovereign power compels me. It is time that I should rest, and that having reached the end of the career of which I spoke in the beginning of this discourse, I should look at those who pursue it after me, that I should applaud them to excite them to glory, and show them the recompense which awaits them."

At the beginning of "The Deceiver Punished" appears the portrait of the great man, with this somewhat presumptuous inscription:

> "Both poet and warrior,
> Laurels shall he wear."

Which caused some who did not admire him or his verse, to say: —

> "Both as poet and Gascon,
> Shall he be beaten."

His arms appear below. They bear a lion ascendant, on a field argent probably, for the field of the shield has no hatching. The portrait shows a long, thin, dark face, quite Spanish in character and closely resembling all the heads of that time, — curling hair, waxed and curled moustaches, beard cut to a point, eyes rather large, with heavy eyebrows, aquiline and humped nose: you know the kind of face. The poet wears over a steel gorget a great cravat of Venice lace with long vandykes, open-worked and heavily embroidered. His doublet is covered with points, and on the whole he wears a rather stylish dress, half foppish, half military. What seems strange is that, prefixed to this same play there is found, among eulogious verses in all languages, a madrigal by Corneille which, I fancy, is not widely known: —

"Thy Cleontes by his death
Holds out an attractive fate
To trickery.
In view of the wondrous fame
Which thy pen bestows on him after death,
Gladly would one deceive to be thus punished;
And though it cost him his life,
Men will always envious feel
Of the luck which followed his evil fate,
Since he would no longer live had he not thus died."

Scudéry having published anonymously his reflections on "The Cid," Corneille, who was far from being as modest and patient as it has pleased some writers to represent him, addressed a very sharp letter to him, and launched against him a rondeau in the Marotic style which is as good as the madrigal and which is its palinode: —

"Let him do better, that youthful youth,
Whom the Cid so greatly troubles,
Than to heap insult upon insult,
A dull imposture to angrily rime,
And like a criminal himself conceal.
Every one knows his jealous temper,
Points him out as a serious fool,
And puts no faith in his fine style.
Let him do better.

"All Paris, his challenge reading,
Sends him to the devil and his muse to —
For me, I pity the pains he suffers,
And as a friend beseech him and pray,
If an immortal work he wishes to damn, —
To do better.

"*Omnibus invideas, livide, nemo tibi.*"

Scudéry wrote this criticism of his, addressed to the illustrious Academy, in order to pay his court to the Cardinal Duke, who regretfully witnessed the brilliant success of the "Cid," which eclipsed that of his own

play, and could not bear that Corneille, who had at first been one of the five authors working under his own orders, should seem to emancipate himself; — at least, so it was said. For my part, without affirming that this had nothing to do with the matter, I think Scudéry may very well have written the criticism to please himself, and that he sincerely believed the play a wretched one. Nor is this surprising. For to what extremes will not prejudice lead a man? Every day cleverer people than Scudéry think the finest things in the world pitiful, and demonstrate, with apparent logic, that they are worthless as a matter of fact. The way to do this, though not new, is none the less infallible, and very simple. For instance, you say: "To compose a good tragedy such and such things are required. It must be moral in conception and there must flow from it a grave, austere lesson for mankind; it must contain terror and pity — φοβὸς καὶ ἔλεος — this being the foundation of every tragedy; this and that must be in it, for we see in the Stagirite or elsewhere that it cannot be otherwise. Any one can see plainly that there is nothing of all that in the work which we are reviewing; that the rules have not been observed; that the manners and costumes are inaccurate, the senti-

ments exaggerated; that probability is constantly violated, and that the public is evidently in the wrong when it crowds in to see it, and when it takes such pleasure in it."

Scudéry's criticism of "The Cid" would seem most just and natural to any one that knew French and had not read "The Cid," if such a person existed. He begins first, like every critic who knows his business, by kindly informing you that the piece is utterably damnable, that it is a moral enormity, a monstrosity, that it is parricidal and incestuous, that it violates all human decency and respect. He explains all this at great length, and alleges reasons which are certainly no worse than many others which have been considered sound. Next, when he has fully established the fact that the piece is immoral, infamous, and worthy of being burned by the executioner, he demonstrates that it is absurd, impossible, and carried out in spite of common-sense; he brings out the poverty and puerility of the means employed, the unlikelihood of the entrances and exits, and all this with very close dialectics which it is difficult not to yield to. Then he exhibits the falseness and exaggeration of the characters. He shows you that the Count of Gormas is nothing but a

comedy bully and a mountain-swallower, Rodriguez a popinjay, Ximena a dissolute woman and an adventuress who does not know what good form is, Don Arias a stiff lover, Isabella a useless personage, and the king a downright fool. Having proved this, he has now only to strike the last blow, a secret thrust, more difficult to parry than all the others. Not only is the work immoral, absurd, improbable, it is copied, from one end to the other. You believe that much belauded "Cid" to be Corneille's work? Well, not at all, it is the work of Guillen de Castro, and as Claveret elegantly remarks, "Corneille had merely to choose in that beautiful nosegay of Spanish jessamine in bloom, which was brought into his very room. And even then, how did he imitate, in what kind of verses has he set these beautiful starry flowers which bloom in the garden of Guillen de Castro? In verses which often lack the rest after the hemistich, and which are crowded with faults of grammar and with barbarisms." And to prove his assertion he quotes more than two hundred passages translated, copied or imitated.

Two or three hundred passages copied!

I hope that is conclusive enough. Nowadays no author could recover from such an attack; and truly,

without being of Scudéry's opinion, one cannot help conceding, great as is the respect which one has for the bronze statue of old Corneille, that the chief merit of "The Cid" is not in the invention of the subject or of the details, but in the elevation of thought, in the vigorous, solid, indestructible form of the style and the verse.

The most amusing thing is the final slap, in which Scudéry gravely reproaches M. de Corneille, recently ennobled, with being truly and ignorantly swollen with pride; with being more puffed up and more stilted than the Castilians of his tragedy; with believing himself the first poet in the world because of some slight praise he has received; and with being disdainful of more illustrious people than himself. He tells him that he ought to consider it an honour to be a simple citizen in the republic of letters, that he ought not to attempt to become its tyrant.

The latter accusation appears not to lack justification. Corneille, it seems, had taken for a motto this line of "The Cid,"

"To myself alone I owe my renown."

This terribly shocked Scudéry, who seems to have believed himself very modest. For the matter of that,

modesty is scarcely the failing of the writers of that day; they are more swollen with pride than the frog that was envious of the ox. Spanish wind distends their skin until they are near bursting. Spanish hyperbole has invaded everything, the novel, tragedy, comedy (which was the drama of that day), songs, couplets, music, dancing, and fashion. It is the same proud poverty, the same beggar's vanity, the same wealth of gaudy rags. It is the real time of mud-bespattered and would-be heroic poets, of highly refined poetry dull as ditchwater. All the epigraphs, all the mottoes are Spanish; everything is imitated or translated from the Spanish; festivals, cards, masquerades, tilts are in the Spanish taste. People make love in Spanish fashion; gallantry is characterised by the amazing puerility which marks amorous commerce beyond the Pyrenees. It is a succession of escalades and duels. Lovers who do not know how to swim jump into the water booted and spurred in the hope of softening the heart of their love, or cause themselves to be brought to her apartments in a box at the risk of stifling in it. Every madrigal is a fabulous exaggeration, and it is hard to believe that such things could ever have been said. Every sonnet is a casket which contains more pearls,

diamonds, sapphires, and topazes than ever were brought together in a jeweller's shop or in a king's treasury.

The sun figures continually, dragged in about the very first eye that comes along, called one-eyed and blind; and it is robbed of the rank and title of grand-duke of the candles, which Dubartas had so graciously given to it in favour of some Phyllis in a house of ill-fame or some ancient Philaminta. It was a great time. Types abounded on all hands. Every figure stands out clearly against the background of the age; every one of the characters casts on the wall, as it passes, a sharp, clearly defined silhouette. There is the scholar, the pedant, the Sidias, half cad, half valet, with dirty hands and dirty face; a black, patched cassock full of holes, spattered with mud, gaping at every seam, spotted with wine dregs, glazed and shining with grease; woollen stockings climbing spirally around the place where the calves ought to be, unfastened breeches, and a vermin-infested wig; a sort of animal stuck full of Greek and Latin like a porcupine, constantly chewing and mumbling some threadbare quotation, his pockets always full of books and papers; a drunkard, smelly, miserly, obstinate; a low libertine

who addresses hendecasyllabic verses in the manner of Catullus to the Mollies and Kates of his tavern; for the rest, very learned, versed in all the languages of the world, capable of saying "Bring me drink" in fifty-two different tongues. Then the poet — there is a nice figure! Look at him walking with proud mien, heroically ploughing through the mud with his soleless boots. He is starving, and yet he passes in front of the cook-shops with the most indifferent air. Accost him, and this is what he will tell you: "Oh, how I gorged myself this morning! We were five or six veteran eaters, and we stuffed ourselves as full as we could hold. Among other things there was a wild boar's ear and a saddle of young ass, washed down with a light Arbois wine which was not half bad and which makes me lick my lips at the mere thought of it." Then if you follow the poet who has had such a good breakfast, you will see him, after he has turned into a solitary lane, munch, under cover of his mantle, a bit of hard bread and a piece of stale cheese which he has stolen from a mouse-trap. His breeches are made of a thesis printed on satin, and his rapier was formerly a spit. His poverty does not prevent his believing himself a really spoiled child of the Muses, the beloved

son of Apollo, the favourite of kings and of beauties, nor his gravely promising to immortalise all those who will be good enough to let him dine with their kitchen scullion and sleep in a dog-kennel or in the stable. Nor is the braggart less entertaining, with his chest well thrown out as in Callot's grotesques, one foot planted forward, one hand on his hip, head thrown back, his absurdly long rapier adorned with a no less absurdly large shell, his extravagant and huge plume, his titanic moustache which pierces the heavens with its two sharp points; and when, following Scudéry's example, he mingles literary pretensions with every one of his boasts, you laugh until you nearly split your sides. Just listen to him! With what a superior and grandiose air he cavalierly treats poetry: "I am but a soldier, I understand better how to arrange battalions than periods, and I have used more arquebus matches than candle-wicks; I can handle the sword better than the pen, and it is rather on the battle-field than on this meadow of white paper that my valour should be judged of. This little work, which the reader cannot fail to consider admirable, — for the most honourable people in the world have considered it to be so, — I wrote by way of satisfying my fancy and passing

the time, and not to derive any profit from it, so that I give to the players what I might have sold to them, —" and no end of other vain boasts. And then the noble swashbuckler, using false dice, coining counterfeit money; and the Italian adventuresses with their velvet masks, perfumed, rouged, of such elegant, bold figure, having always amid their pots of pomade, their scent bottles, some little flagons of delicate poison and a powder with which to prepare the *boccone;* and the good, pot-bellied citizens, cautious and testy, ever ready to throw up barricades. How harmonious, yet different, are all these types, and what a picture full of variety and *ensemble* they compose!

Scudéry, in spite of his scant talents and his brag, was none the less well thought of by the great cardinal, and Sarrazin, in a "Discourse on Tragedy" prefixed to "Love the Tyrant," does not hesitate to say that the play is one of the finest and most admirable, and that it is safe from the attacks of the envious, both because of its own intrinsic merit and because of a protection which it would be more than sacrilege to violate, since it is that of Armand du Plessis, the tutelary god of letters. Through Madame de Rambouillet, with whom his sister, Magdalen de Scudéry, was very intimate,

George de Scudéry obtained the post of governor of Our Lady of the Guard in Provence. It is a sort of barrack perched on the summit of a hill, which caused Madame de Rambouillet, who knew thoroughly the character of her friend, to say laughingly that he was very well placed, and that this devil of a man would never, on any account, have accepted a governorship in a valley; consequently he would be admirably situated there, perched upon a rock which overlooked the whole country and with his head in the clouds. This post was probably given him about 1641 or 1642. Chapelle and Bachaumont, speaking of the castle of Our Lady of the Guard in most comical fashion, say it was in every respect a nest fit for such a bird: —

"Every one knows that Marseilles
Is rich, illustrious, nonpareil
For its situation and its port.
But if we are to tell you of a fort
Which no doubt a marvel is,
It is Our Lady of the Guard;
A commodious and fine command
Which needs no further guard
Than a Swiss with his halberd armed,
Painted upon the castle gate.
. . . Gentlemen, there
It is long since any one entered.
The governor of that rock,

Posting off to return to court,
Did some fifteen years ago
In his pocket carry off the key."

It would seem, nevertheless, that the governorship did not bring in much revenue, if we may judge by the lines which Scudéry, being ill, sent to the Cardinal Duke whom he had recently accompanied into Piedmont.

"But notwithstanding the illustrious favour
Which makes my lot illustrious and great,
But for you this my important place
Shall soon become of my tomb the site.

"Yes, upon this distant rock,
If your hand does not succour me,
I shall resemble Prometheus,
Whom a vulture, 't is said, did devour.

"Hunger, that terrible vulture
Which is so much to be feared,
With its beak so pitiless
Shall come and persecute me there.

"Great Duke, from me this danger now remove!
Care for a soldier who served you well;
And by a miracle in our day renewed
Upon this desert make the manna fall."

Scudéry had spent a great deal of money in installing himself there, and transporting to the spot numberless cases containing the portraits of all the poets, from

Jean Marot, father of Clement, down to Colletet; for Scudéry, who was a pretty thoughtless person, wasted the small means he possessed in trifles of this sort, and administered his property very ill in spite of his sister's efforts to inspire him with the spirit of thrift and economy. Undoubtedly he was not rich enough to form a gallery of paintings, if we are to believe Legros, who relates that having come a long distance to visit a certain Mlle. de Palaiseau, formerly courted by Paul Scarron, he dined off a piece of bread in one of the walks of the Luxembourg, unable apparently to pay for a meal elsewhere. The lines we have just quoted support this statement; yet if Scudéry was short of money, it was probably due to his carelessness rather than to actual poverty, for his books — though discredited since his day and poor though they certainly were — sold uncommonly well, and he wrote many. Boileau himself acknowledged this, with that tone of sulkiness and bitterness usual to him: —

> Fortunate Scudéry, whose fertile pen
> Can each month easily a volume write.
> Your writings, it is true, lacking art and dull,
> Seem to be composed in spite of common-sense;
> But yet they find, in spite of what men say,
> A tradesman to sell and fools to read them.

Balzac, although he praised the tragedy of "Arminius," was not, it seems to me, a very great admirer of our poet, or of the learned Saumaize with whom he couples him: "Oh, fortunate writers! You, M. de Saumaize, in Latin, and you, M. de Scudéry, in French, can write more note-books than I can write almanacs. Fortunate are the writers who make use of memory and their fingers only in their work."

If Balzac means that de Saumaize and de Scudéry were wrong to produce a large quantity of very poor stuff, his reproach is very well founded; but his phrase is turned in such fashion that it might be believed it is facility of production which he ridicules. One of the first gifts of genius is abundance, fruitfulness; all great geniuses have produced enormously, and it has never been meritorious to take a very long time to do a very little thing, whatever may say both Malherbe and Balzac and all the slow writers whose brain is choked with the soot of the midnight oil, and who suffer from the difficulty of expressing their thoughts.

Scudéry had also his admirers, Claveret, Chaudeville, Mairet, Chapelain, Conrart, and other wits of the day, for he is not absolutely devoid of merit, as might be thought at first glance. He possessed invention,

facility (which he always indulges in to excess, it is true), and here and there one comes upon bright and witty traits. As a descriptive poet he is often worthy of praise. The underlying idea in one of his volumes of verse, entitled "The Cabinet," is really very ingenious. He supposes a gallery formed of all the objects of art, pictures or statues which he has seen in Italy or elsewhere during his travels, or else which he owns himself, and he writes about each picture a few verses in which the story of the subject is interwoven with the description. He dwells at great length upon the portrait of Duke Armand de Richelieu by Philippe de Champagne (this portrait is now in the gallery of the Palais-Royal),[1] and on that of Master Adam, the Nevers joiner, and author of "The Pegs." This latter portrait is by Chauvau. He also speaks at great length of Callot's work. He wrote still another volume of miscellaneous poems, among which are some rather well turned, besides an enormous number of sonnets, several of which have for their subject the Fountain of Vaucluse and the loves of Laura and Petrarch, and I know not how many poems and harangues; "The Faithful Caloander," a chivalrous

[1] Since removed to the Louvre.

romance translated from the Italian, which I read some six or seven years ago in the house of a village priest, and of which I remember the title only; and the novel of "Polixandre," a continuation of "Astræa." This shows that he was a prolific author. Pélisson calculates that he wrote from eleven to twelve thousand verses, — a calculation evidently much below the truth, since his works contain sixteen plays, all of them in verse, with the exception of "A Comedy of the Comedians," and each one at least fifteen hundred lines long. "Alaric" alone contains eleven thousand lines; so Boileau could truly say that he brought forth without difficulty a volume a month.

"The Illustrious Bassa" and "Cyrus the Great" appeared under the name of George de Scudéry, "Governor of Our Lady of the Guard, and a Captain on the strength of His Majesty's Galleys," as he never failed to state. In these two books the prefaces and dedications alone are by him, and the only work he did was to read the proofs. Eventually, however, he had got to believe that it was he who had written his sister's novels, and he would rage most fearfully when the contrary was maintained; hence some amusing quarrels.

Having been obliged to withdraw to Granville in Normandy, in consequence of some slight intrigue in behalf of the Prince of Condé, he met, at the house of Madame de l'Épinay-Miron, Miss Mary Frances de Moncel de Martin-Wast, who fell deeply in love with him and whom he married. He had by her a very handsome and very witty boy, who later entered the church. Madame de Scudéry, left a widow at thirty-six, did not marry again, but lived in Paris, where she died at the age of eighty-one in 1712. Scudéry himself died also in Paris on May 14, 1667. He had been elected a member of the Academy in succession to the purist Vaugelas, the translator of Quintus Curtius.

Apart from his many absurdities, he had some good points: in friendship he was faithful and perfectly trustworthy; he wrote the apology of Hardy, his master in the dramatic art; he edited very kindly the works of several of his friends, among others Elzéar de Sarcilly, Sire of Chaudeville, who died at the age of twenty-two; he was the only one who did not forsake Théophile de Viau in his misfortunes; he maintained that de Viau was the greatest poet in the world and the rarest wit that ever lived, and he ended by saying that

whoever doubted that had better learn that he was called de Scudéry. He also built de Viau a tomb in verse, which is to be seen at the beginning of his works and in which he praises him in the most intrepid fashion at a time when Théophile's dearest friends pretended not to be aware that he had ever lived. Chevreau relates in his "Ana" a trait which does him the greatest honour. Here is the passage: —

"Queen Christina told me once that she was reserving, in return for his forthcoming dedication to her of his poem 'Alaric,' a gold chain worth a thousand pistoles; but when the Count of Lagardie, who is very highly spoken of in that poem, fell into disgrace with the queen, she desired that the Count's name should be struck out of the work. When I informed him of this, he replied that the chain might be as big and as heavy as that of the Incas, but he would not destroy the altar on which he had offered up sacrifice. This heroic pride displeased the queen, who changed her mind; and the Count of Lagardie, obliged to acknowledge Scudéry's generosity, did not even thank him for it."

Scudéry was unlucky in everything. Madame d'Aiguillon had obtained for him a priory worth 4000 livres

a year; at the end of six months the prior, who had been believed dead, but had only been taken prisonerby the enemy, reappeared, and Scudéry had to give up the property. At the very moment when he was finishing "Alaric," the Queen of Sweden, in whose honour he had undertaken to write it, abdicated piteously.

Since we have done with the rather wearisome biographical details which have just been read, let us speak at somewhat greater length of "Alaric, or Rome Conquered," a heroic poem dedicated to Her Most Serene Highness the Queen of Sweden by M. de Scudéry, Governor of Our Lady of the Guard. The work is adorned with copper-plate engravings, and opens with a frontispiece on which is seen Alaric, sceptre in hand, with a plumed helmet, in the centre of an architectural design surmounted by a shield bearing the arms of Sweden supported by two crowned lions. Below are prisoners, their hands tied behind their backs, recalling statues of the great king. Next comes a very interesting dedicatory epistle. In it the author professes the most extreme admiration for Queen Christina. Among other things he says: "I protest, Madam, that I venerate Your Majesty no less than if I had been born on the shores of the Baltic Sea, and I

question whether Your Majesty would meet among the Goths with as much admiration and respect as I bear towards her in my heart. Indeed, those who have tried to make us accept pyramids, tombs, and colossi as wonders of the world, have tacitly told us that they had no Christinas in their time, for they would not have wasted their time describing them as prodigies of art, had they possessed so great a miracle of nature to tell us about." That is most gallantly turned and most admirably reasoned out. A little farther on he adds: "I must confess that the North has now its Minerva in Stockholm, as formerly it had its Diana in Tauris; that wit and virtue belong to no particular climate, and that they are found as well in Stockholm and Upsala as in Rome and Athens. Since the death of the great Cardinal Richelieu, my master, I have given very little praise to any one because I have seen very little to praise; but one cannot be silent about a royal hand which often deigns to lay down the sceptre in order to take up our books, and which brings back that happy time when, we are told, philosophers reigned and kings were philosophers. . . . I know that it does not belong to a grinder of paints to dare undertake to paint you, but if my power has

equalled my zeal, a fair Amazonian Queen shall perhaps have her Apelles as Alexander had his, and the glory of Thomyris and Amalazontha, your forerunners, will be wholly eclipsed by the incomparable brilliancy of Your Majesty's fame. . . . It is not enough for me that one should be called *Porphyrogenetes*, and unless the royal sceptre of kings is matched by royal virtues, I esteem it as little as I do a shepherd's crook."

It would appear that this rather curious word, *porphyrogenetes*, was a particular favourite with Scudéry, for when he composed the compliment he had to speak at his reception, he sent to Conrart, secretary of the Academy, these three lines to be added in a place which he indicated: "The Academy may, more justly than the emperors of the East, call itself porphyrogenetes, since it was born in the purple of cardinals, of kings, and of chancellors." A sublime and splendid idea indeed, which was well worthy an insert.

Let us return to the dedicatory epistle. "To behold so extraordinary a thing I would go not only as far as Thule, where Virgil sets the ultimate bounds of the world, but I would go, if necessary, beyond the new world discovered since his time. One must know in order to love, it is said, and yet I love without

knowing, — if the inequality of conditions permits the use of this word and if respect suffers it; but why should it not suffer us to love kings, who are but the image of God, since God himself not only suffers us to love Him, not only commands it, but puts that command first and foremost of all? So, when I learned that Your Majesty had fallen into the sea, I felt my heart beat at the dreadful news, and in the midst of the very peril in which Your Majesty was I should have been less pale than I then became. If this terrible adventure happened in the way it was related to me, the chisel, the brush and the colours would have fallen from my hands; the triumphal arch which I have erected in your honour would have remained unfinished, and it would have been seen only as the illustrious ruins of Rome, in which by the beauty of a few broken columns one judges of the grandeur of the whole building."

This may give the reader an idea of the modesty of our friend and of the prefatory style. It would appear further that the queens of the North had the unenviable monopoly of the dedication of epic poems: Saint-Amant's "Moses" is dedicated to the Queen of Poland.

After the dedicatory epistle comes a portrait of Queen Christina with this quatrain below: —

> "Laws Christina may impose
> Upon the bravest conqueror;
> But does the earth a ruler hold
> Who is worthy her slave to be?"

Then comes the inevitable dissertion upon the excellence and super-excellence of the epic poem above and beyond all others; on the manner of preparing and dishing it up; on the question whether the inspiration should be sought in fable or history; on the question whether or not mythology may be introduced into it; and on many other fine problems, the poet showing, as is the custom, that he is perfectly well acquainted with all the proportions and alignments taught by art and that he has consulted the masters thereof, that is: Aristotle and Horace, and after them Macrobius, Scaliger, Tasso, Castelvetro, Piccolomini, Vida, Vossius, Pacius, Riccoboni, Robortel, Paul Benni, Mambrunus, and several others; that he has read and re-read most carefully Homer's "Iliad" and "Odyssey," Virgil's "Æneid," Lucan's "Pharsalia," Statius' "Thebaid," Boiardo's and Ariosto's "Orlando in Love," and "Orlando Furious," the famous Torquato's incompar-

able "Jerusalem," and a great number of other epic poems in divers tongues, such as the first books of Ronsard's "Franciad," Father Lemoine's "Saint Louis," the fine poem of "The Conquest of Granada," the best work that Italy has given us since Tasso's time: and finally he proves that poetry was not invented, as Castelvetro roundly maintains, *per dilettare è ricreare gli animi della rozza moltitudine è del commune popolo*, but to delight gods and kings.

In the same dissertation he justifies himself on the highest authority for having made his Alaric in love with the beautiful Amalazontha. Hugo has said:

> "Chaste love doth ennoble souls,
> And who true love knows, knows how to die."

Scudéry is also of the opinion that there is no heroism without love; honest love is, properly speaking, the fire of Hercules, which, burning him up, made him a god; and as Guevarre, one of the finest wits of Spain, has very elegantly said, "*Arde y no quema; alumbra y no dana; quema y no consume; resplandece y no lastima; purifica y no abrasa, y aun caliente y no congoxa.*" These are the best reasons in the world, and they cannot be denied. He also states that his "Alaric" is in ten books simply because he chose to have

that number; besides, the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" contain twenty-four, the "Æneid" twelve, the "Punica" of Silius Italicus seventeen, Ariosto's "Orlando" forty-six, Boiardo's sixty-eight, "Jerusalem Delivered" twenty, and Marini's "Adonis" twenty also, which proves that there is no absolute rule and that every one may do as he pleases. Heaven be praised, — and George de Scudéry! for in truth I fail to see why he did not write sixty-eight cantos, as did Boiardo.

Next we come to the Privilege, which it would be a mistake to skip, for it is the most entertaining part of the book. It is written by Conrart, and Scudéry, having read it, sent it back to him, complaining that that was not the kind of Privilege he wrote for his friends, and he had better retouch it; which Conrart did most complaisantly. Here are the passages: . . . "Our dear and well beloved Sire de Scudéry, Governor of Our Lady of the Guard in Provence and a Captain on the strength of Our galleys, has caused Us to be informed that he has written a heroic poem entitled 'Alaric, or Rome Conquered,' which he intends to adorn with figures engraved and drawn by the best masters of the day, in order to render it worthier of his intended dedication of it to the Most Serene Queen

of Sweden, Our very dear and well beloved cousin and ally, who by her striking virtues and her royal liberality attracts the admiration and the good will of men of wit and learning in all parts of Europe; but considering that this cannot be done save at great expense, both for the printing as well as for the figures, he has most humbly beseeched Us to grant him Our letters necessary to prevent his work being pirated in this realm, and exposed for sale if it is pirated elsewhere. Wherefore, having in mind to treat favourably the petitioner, who — after having signalised himself by divers brave and valorous deeds during more than a score of years spent in the army during the reign of the late King Our most honoured Lord and Father, both by land and sea, in France and in foreign countries, in which he has held honourable commands and posts — has for some time past withdrawn from this hard profession, and in a quieter walk of life has shown by a great number of beautiful products of his mind that he was born as much for letters as for arms, We have granted to him, etc., etc. Done by the King in His Council. Conrart." And it is sealed upon the parchment with a great seal of yellow wax. That is a splendid idea, worthy of modern comradeship, to have

praises of so official a character bestowed upon one, to be declared a great man notwithstanding opposition, injunction, and reservations, and all this sealed with a seal of yellow wax upon parchment! What can be more respectable or more capable of imposing silence upon malignant critics? Modern prospectuses are poor things in comparison, even when drawn up by good Charles Nodier, the man of our time who praises with the most shameless guilelessness and candour. I place the praise in that Privilege far above the Spanish, Italian, Latin, or Greek sonnets, the Hebrew or Syriac madrigals, the learned procession of which winds pompously along the first pages of every new work, and I am sorry, in truth, that Privileges are no longer prefixed to books, for I should infallibly have made use of that literary subterfuge in my next epic poem.

The subject of the poem itself is very simple. An angel suggests to Alaric the idea of overthrowing Rome, the crimes of which have at last wearied the patience of the Almighty. Alaric joyfully accepts this high commission; but the fair Amalazontha, who is the object of his love, cannot bear his going, and does her utmost to keep him back. She fails to do so, and

calls to the help of her charms a necromancer called Rigilde, who fills with phantoms the forest in which trees are being cut for the building of vessels, and drives crazy a white bear which devours the workmen. The killing of this bear is a mere pastime for Alaric, who is very valiant and very skilful. At last the fleet sets sail. The wizard Rigilde puts the sailors to sleep and carries off Alaric, also asleep, into an enchanted island where he shows him a sham Amalazontha. The prelate of Upsala with difficulty breaks the spell, and carries away the Gothic prince in spite of his opposition. Assassins, which are but shadows, appear to stab with many blows Amalazontha, herself a shadow. It is a devilish illusion, due to Rigilde, which soon vanishes. Herein lies the dualism, the conflict in the poem: Rigilde draws Alaric one way, the prelate of Upsala draws him the other; for there is a myth in this aforementioned poem neither more nor less than in a novel of Madame Sand's. Alaric is man's soul; the spell under which he falls, like Ulysses in Calypso's isle, is symbolical of man's weakness, even the strongest men, who, deprived of the help of divine grace, fall into strange errors, but, thanks to its powerful help, succeed in rising again

and then getting rid of the errors themselves. The magician who persecutes him represents the obstacles which the demons always throw in the way of good intentions. The beautiful Amalazontha is the powerful temptation of voluptuousness; the great number of enemies who oppose him are the world, which is one of the three that the Christian soul has to fight, according to the Sacred Scriptures and the Fathers. The invincible defence of the hero is free will; the endless tricks of the demons are the incessant warfare they wage against the soul. The attacking of Rome and the Prince's triumph are the victory of reason over the world, the flesh, and the devil, and the immortal crowns which God bestows upon virtue.

All the same the poem, looked at as a poem, is uncommonly wearisome. In colour and details it is occasionally interesting. It represents much more faithfully the times in which it was composed than any of the works which are superior to it. One can plainly perceive Louis XIV and his court through all these Gothic princes and Scandinavian lords. They all wear full-bottomed wigs, gold or silver cloth cuirasses, and kilts. Their costume is very like that seen in the "Battles of Alexander," — warriors covered

with scales, red on one side and yellow on the other, baldrics heavily braided, fluttering draperies of changing colours, aigrettes, and extravagantly tall plumes; chins up, toes turned out, as if the warriors were about to dance a minuet; massive carved and gilded cars drawn by big horses, satin white, with enormous rumps, and tails properly trussed up; great trees with long leaves deeply indented and of the crudest green; boats with richly emblazoned prows worked by half-naked men the colour of pumpkins, who academically show off all the muscles of their brawny arms; landscapes in which yellow and ultramarine prevail; seas green as leeks; palaces with huge terraces and staircases; walks lined with orange trees in apple-green boxes; round ponds, cascades falling in sheets, jets of water, and all the waterworks of the Gardens of Versailles. You find all that in Alaric; drawing, costume, colour, architecture, landscape, — the times are accurately reflected, even in the least details. One would swear, for instance, that this was sketched and coloured by Lebrun or Parrocel; it is the portrait of a female warrior: —

> "Her wavy hair, with great golden curls
> Carelessly falling, makes her fairer yet.

Her brow 's adorned with a tall ermine cap
Whose wondrous whiteness her good looks becomes ;
A heron's plume of darkest black
Makes whiter yet the ermine white.
A loose dress she wears of skin of tiger made,
Which, though savage looking, most tasteful is ;
By a buckle caught up it lets the eye perceive
Her buskins lined with a vulture's skin.
Of grass is her quiver, of whalebone her bow ;
Her scarf of reeds down to the ground extends,
Her sword supporting, and its verdure fair
Mingles with the spotted white that covers her form
The whiteness of her arms, to the ermine opposed,
A new lustre wins that makes it fairer still,
And her brilliant complexion, spite of its rosy blush,
Would make a swan show black by its side.
Her features all are exquisite, her figure superb,
She walks with a gait worthy of a goddess,
And in her mien, superb as its appears,
Is fear-inspiring yet attractive pride."

There is a charming costume for you, well fitted for a ballet. It is quite in the semi-antique, semi-romantic mode of the day ; nothing could harmonise better with the boxwood hedges and the curly-wigged Tritons of the basins. Here now is the description of a fountain : —

" In the middle of the court a fountain rare
Throws high in air its ever-welling wave,
And these ascending jets splash down again

Upon the marble white their waters lave.
Of many marine monsters the figures quaint
On this transparent frame has sculpture placed ;
And this broad basin, opening like a vase,
Rests on a jasper pillar, red and green.
In the basin's midst is a Nereid
Trying to dry her still wet hair,
And who, seeming to press her long and wondrous locks,
Makes foam and water ever from them spring.
The tritons twelve which the machine upbear
Are seen to gaze upon this water nymph,
And through their shells hurl high in air
A thousand streams of crystal pure."

These Tritons are cousins german to those of Versailles; they must all have been cast by the brothers Augier or the Kellers; the nymph is probably by Coysevox or Girardon. The style is exactly the same, and it is impossible to tell whether the poet writes after seeing the work of the sculptor, or whether the sculptor has carried out in marble or in bronze the imaginary description of the poet.

Boileau's line is well known, —

" A surfeit of festoons, a wealth of astragals ; "

but, please Boileau, there is a great deal of dash and imagination in the description of the enchanted palace. Its architecture is of marvellous richness. There are

columns rising above columns, domes of prodigious height, endless galleries, golden trellises, jets of water springing heavenward, great marble staircases, pot-bellied balusters correct in style and handsome, rustic and non-rustic cabinets, vases, and statues, bowers cut in a thousand fashions, groups of statues, — a fairy Versailles, which neither Levau nor Hardouin Mansart nor Le Nôtre would have disavowed. This façade seems to be worthy of any architect. Neither Bramante nor Bernini could be more fecund or richer.

"But the great building's royal front,
Effacing all the rest, unequalled is.
The eye is charmed, the mind amazed,
The hand itself trembles as it describes.
Throughout the Corinthian order reigns,
The fair acanthus leaf curls everywhere,
And mid these ornaments are ever seen
Triumphal helms and smoking vases high.
Festoons in every part and crowns at every point,
Bases and capitals, columns, pilasters,
Masks and cupids, ciphers interlaced,
And skulls of rams that are strung on cords.
On moulding and cornice the glance e'er rests,
On figures of bronze in niches rich,
Friezes, balconies, outworks, and scrolls and shields,
And fruit-filled cornucopias with golden leaves and blooms.
All, in a word, that architecture can achieve,
Or fine art of drawing and sculpture rare,

All shines brilliantly on this palace front,
Which never had its like and never shall."

The staircase is not unworthy of the façade: —

". . . The stair
Shows its length, superb and singular;
Carved in white, pure marble, a hundred nymphs are ranged —
Great baskets of flowers on their heads upborne, —
Heads adorned by art and nature both —
And seem to seek to the rich apartments to ascend;
Their left maintains the splendid basket; firm upholds
The right the rich folds of their antique dress;
And art has transformed, by its noble effort,
The veins of the marble into those of their form."

Comes now the bathroom: —

"Octagonal in shape it looks to the dawn.
Four steps of marble deeply sunk,
Are fitted to sit on by the silver wave
Which into the jasper bath abundant flows.
Swift pours the water from the crystal urn
Held under right arm by metal river god,
Which amid the reeds and iris wet
Seems to rest his brow with wrinkles seamed,
While with one hand he seeks to dry
The long, wet hair that surely troubles him,
And at the same time to dry the bristling beard
That drips under the hand that presses it.
In every angle a column stands, and there besides are seen
The linen and the perfumes in golden vases four
That carving rare in low relief adorns.

Four marble nymphs in four recesses placed
As if from bath emerging their garments lift,
And show their bodies white and passing fair."

I confess that this palace, though solemnly anathematised by Boileau, pleases me greatly, and that I would very well like to walk with some La Vallière or Amalazontha under —

"The thick and covert shade
Cast by the green architecture of the grove, —"

and the more peacefully that, as simple Scudéry artlessly remarks, —

"The precepts of art are carefully observed."

Talking of the precepts of art, I have forgotten, and it is one of his greatest titles to classic glory, that Scudéry was the first to introduce the rule of twenty-four hours into his "Liberal Love," the result unquestionably of a fine imagination, and which ought to have earned for him the indulgence of the Regent of Parnassus. Unfortunately, Scudéry did not always stick to classical regularity. He has written a comedy full of fantastic freedom, a sort of a play turned inside out, in which the scenery is reversed and which shows you the back

of the actor, the spectator being, as it were, placed at the back of the stage. This curious production is entitled "The Comedy of the Comedians."

Among the numerous historical or imaginary personages, pitiful or comical, who strut about the great stage of the world and who are subject to be transformed into dramatic heroes, without their leave being asked, by the caprice of the first pedant that happens along, there is one class of people whose profession seems to protect them against such a misfortune. It scarcely occurs to one to think of an undertaker being buried, or of a hangman being hanged; and for the same reason it seems strange that a player should put himself on the stage, he who is in the habit of putting others on it; and yet there is something piquant in seeing an actor, a man who expresses only thoughts which are not his, who lives on the love and passion which are portioned out to him, who does not breathe a sigh which has not been marked down for him, who does not make a gesture which is not artificial, — it is piquant, I say, to see such a man express, for once, his own ideas, his own every-day thoughts, and talk a little of his household affairs, of his kitchen, of his loves, of his wife and his legitimate children; he who has made

so many declarations of love to beautiful princesses under the shade of paper trees, and who has so pitifully dirtied his only pair of silk breeches by dragging himself on his knees across carpets of painted canvas. It is fun to see beaten by his own wife this thoroughpaced libertine, who has contracted so many secret marriages and who almost every evening at the end of the play is obliged to acknowledge — thanks to a gold bracelet made of copper and adorned with sapphires of blue glass — some charming little bastard girl who was carried away quite young and taken off to Algiers by Moorish corsairs. But the poor comedian possesses himself so little, he is so fatally a prey to imitation, that he cannot even be himself when he is himself; he must play always and incessantly. He cannot wipe off that powder and rouge which destroy his natural complexion, which sink into his skin; Scapin's tunic clings as close to his body as did the robe of Dejanira to the body of Hercules; and if he does drink a bottle of wine — not one of those bottles turned in wood, from which he pours imaginary bumpers into a bottomless goblet, but a genuine, joyous bottle, full of good, real wine — he cannot carelessly throw away the cork as any one else would do; he has to pick it up and put

it in his pocket, for he will use it to blacken his eyebrows when next he plays the part of a tyrant or a traitor. What a life is his! His own face is not his own, his smiles and his tears do not belong to him, he is obliged to conceal his lilies under plaster, his roses under rouge; according to the requirements of the part, he must exchange his beautiful black hair for a wig of tow. His real name is the only name by which he is never called. The fancy of an author may compel him to use on his visage a decoction of that very licorice intended to cure the cold which he took last winter when playing the part of a Roman, bare-armed and bare-legged, with the thermometer at ten below zero. Unquestionably, next to being the lover of a woman who has moustaches, the worst of all human conditions is that of a player, or a dramatic artist, as it is now called. And yet, O Public, you brute beast, men resign themselves to that martyrdom for the sake of being bombarded with rotten apples by you! Such a life leaves a good deal for the imagination and can furnish an excellent basis for a comedy, though M. Casimir Delavigne did write a poor one on this subject, which nevertheless in its day enjoyed some reputation.

Another poet, Gougenot of Dijon, a fellow-countryman of mustard, also wrote a "Comedy of Comedians." The Dijon man's play has the same title as that by the Governor of Our Lady of the Guard, and I cannot quite reconcile this fact with Scudéry's claim that his comedy is a poem of a new invention, in the style called *capriccioso* by the Italians. Gougenot's play is of 1603 and Scudéry's is of 1605, which establishes a strong presumption in favour of the former; nevertheless the latter's play is the brighter and the more fantastically developed, and we merely mention the other to recall it.

The Count of Vigny condescended to tell us that his "Chatterton" cost him seventeen nights of work; Scudéry begins by informing us that if his play succeeds as well in book form as on the stage, he will not regret the fortnight which it took him to write it. A fortnight is less pretentious than seventeen nights, but not so bad considering the times.

Here comes Prologue. The famous Mondory plays the part. He is indignant at the absurd things which they are trying to make him believe. His comrades must be crazy. They tell him that he is not on the stage, that this is the city of Lyons; that yonder is an

inn and here a tennis court, where comedians who are not themselves and yet who are themselves, are representing a pastoral. How the devil can any one believe such nonsense? They pretend that he, for his part, is a certain M. de Blandimare, although his real name is Mondory; and his companions have all taken assumed names, Belleombre, Beauséjour, Beausoleil, as if the public did not know them and did not know that they are the comedians of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, and not a provincial troupe. For his part, he will have nothing to do with it and begs the public to excuse this fantasy and to keep quiet. These gentlemen, being of a very melancholy disposition, are exceedingly fond of silence.

The scene represents the entrance to the playhouse; two posters, as huge as the posters of a modern benefit performance, are affixed on either side of the door. Belleombre, the janitor of the company, wearing a Spanish sombrero, fiercely curled moustaches, a tuft in the shape of an artichoke leaf, his shoes covered with extravagant rosettes, a cloak capriciously twisted around his body, his left hand resting upon the hilt of a colossal sword which must have been worn by Goliath the giant and which resembles the symbolical sword which the painters place in the hand of Saint

Paul, one foot stuck out, and proudly posed, awaits in a stoical and solemn attitude the kind public which is in no hurry to come. If things do not mend, he will be compelled, in spite of himself, to give the lie to the proverb, "A playhouse porter is a thief;" for however expert one may be in the use of pincers and hook, there are no fingers crooked enough to extract anything out of emptiness and to cut the purse of nothingness. The company's treasury is as empty as the drum; there is not a single doubloon, not a red cent, not even a bad penny. Yet, it is past five o'clock; the play has not begun, and it should be ended; the drummer, accompanied by Harlequin, his faithful Achates, has just finished his turn through the town. Harlequin is quite bewildered. It is the first time he has gone through the streets without being noticed. He has not attracted any more attention than if he were a citizen, or if all the citizens had been Harlequins; even the little boys are like so many Greek sages in jackets, and have thought no more of his jokes than if they were Socrates. That tail of street boys which from times immemorial has instinctively glued itself to the back of every drummer, remains occupied in playing at hop-scotch and chuck-hole.

It is impossible to stir these worthy provincials, sunk in a marmot's torpor. The drumming of the drum, and the *sangodemi* of Harlequin have been as ineffective as the lies of the poster. The company runs great risk this evening of being deprived of its necessary nourishment and of having to go to bed without having swallowed anything else than the fog and the damp wind.

At last appears an honest, kindly-faced man who saunters by the wall with an air of idlesse that promises well. He looks like a heavy father or an uncle. He is an uncle, looking for his rascal of a nephew, an occupation worthy of such a relative. He looks up, reads the poster, and asks the price of the seats. "Eight pence," replies Belleombre, who is none else than the nephew of the aforesaid uncle, and who, after having tried all the kinds of life to which debauch can reduce a young man, has enrolled himself in a company of strolling players. "Ah!" exclaims the nephew, "it is that devil of an uncle of mine. I am lost, lost!" The uncle scolds him, like the regular uncle that he is. His nephew advises him to go in at once and to reserve his seat; if he finds no one in the house, it is because all the spectators have gone into

the tennis court next door and are waiting until the play begins, to come in together. The uncle is not to be fooled; and like every comedy uncle, although apparently a scold and ill-tempered, he is at bottom kind-hearted. He invites his nephew and the whole company to come and sup with him at the Pine Cone Hotel where he is lodging.

The supper is done, the finger-bowls have been passed round. M. de Blandimare, the uncle, who is quite a gallant, offers his hand to the ladies to pass into the room, and affects maliciously to mistake their names when speaking to them. His error is quite excusable, for the names of comedians are so much alike that it is very difficult not to mistake one for the other: Bellerosse, Belleville, Beauchâteau, Belleroche, Beaulieu, Beaupré, Bellefleur, Bellespine, Beauséjour, Belleombre, Beausoleil. In a word, they alone possess all the belles and beauties of nature. In spite of it all, M. de Blandimare is at bottom a friend of plays and players; but he is an exacting amateur, and is of opinion that actors must be like poetry, melons, and wine, — that is excellent; otherwise they are detestable, and he draws an ideal portrait of the player which seems rather difficult to realise: —

"To deserve the title of good player so many qualities are required that they are rarely met with together. First, nature must do its share by giving the man good looks, for that is what first impresses the mind of the spectators. He must have a fine carriage; free, unconstrained gestures; a clear, distinct, and strong voice. His speech must be free from mispronunciations and from the corrupt accent which one acquires in the provinces; he must speak in pure French. He must have a ready mind and a clear judgment in order to understand verses well, and a good memory to learn them quickly and remember them later and always; he must not be ignorant either of history or of philosophy, else he will make a botch of it, however much he may try, and will often recite things in a way to destroy the sense and as thoroughly wrongly as a musician who lacks ear; his gestures even would then be like those of an indifferent dancer who skips along, always missing the cadence; hence so many extravagant postures, so many unseasonable salutes with the hat such as are seen on the stage. Finally, all his repartees must also be matched or accompanied by a modest boldness which, bordering neither upon effrontery nor timidity, shall be maintained within just proportions; and, to conclude, tears, laughter, love, hatred, indifference, contempt, jealousy, anger, ambition, — in a word, all the passions, — must be depicted on his face whenever he chooses to exhibit them. Now you may judge whether a man of this sort is any less rare than a phœnix."

The poor strolling players humbly confess to their host that they are very far from possessing all these qualities, but though they do not own them all, neither do they lack them all; and if M. de Blandimare will be good enough to listen to them, he will see that they are not so very despicable.

"What plays have you?" asks M. de Blandimare.

"All those of the late Hardy, Théophile's 'Pyramus,' 'Sylvia,' 'Chryseides,' 'Sylvanira,' 'The Follies of Cardenio,' 'The Faithless Confidante,' 'Phyllis of Scyre,' the 'Pastorals' of M. Racan, 'Lygdamon,' 'The Deceiver Punished,' 'Melita,' 'Clitander,' 'The Widow,' 'The Ring of Forgetfulness,' and all that the finest wits of the time have written. For the time being, a Pastoral Eclogue by the author of 'The Deceiver Punished' will, it is thought, suffice."

M. de Blandimare willingly agrees to this proposal, for he is a great friend of that gentleman who, in his opinion, of all those who wear the sword is the one who best handles the pen. The eclogue is recited. M. de Blandimare, delighted, proposes to give up his own room and his bed to the ladies of the company, and, far from blaming his nephew, enrols himself in the troupe and takes a part in the tragi-comedy which

is to be performed on the morrow and which bears the title of "Love Hidden by Love." The company parts, and the stage represents the stage; it is the third act and at the same time the first. Like "Hamlet, Prince of Denmark," this play contains another play. The first one was in prose, an extraordinary thing in that happy time when dramatic poems were all rimed; the second one is in verse. "Gentlemen," says Prologue. — "Ladies," says Argument. — "That ancient Greek philosopher was right" — "Taraminte, the shepherd of Forez" — "who said that men" — "had only one son called Florintor." "Who is this hempfield scarecrow that comes to interrupt me?" — "And who is that personage dressed up in second-hand clothes who accosts me with such ill grace?" — "I am Prologue." — "And I am Argument." Argument and Prologue dispute with each other, and each proves the other useless. Prologue orders Argument to go and hide himself in the crowd, and tells him that he is only fit to dirty himself with printer's ink and to dress up in paper and parchment. Argument calls him old utility, echo, parrot, and the pair withdraw without any conclusion being reached, just as they had come: "Good-bye, Mr. Argument." "Good-bye, Mr. Prologue."

The scene changes again, and represents a pastoral country. We are in Forez, right in the country of Honoré d'Urfé, on the sweet banks of the Lignon, that well-bred river whose waters are whey. It is a lovely country, and I greatly miss it, for my part. The foliage of the trees is of apple-green silk chenille, the grass is of enamel and the flowers of china porcelain. From amid the well-combed bushes great roses as big as cabbages smile pleasantly upon you with their purple lips, and let you read their innocent thoughts within the depths of their scarlet hearts. Clouds of well-combed cotton wool float softly upon the blue taffeta of the sky. Little brooks, formed by lovers' tears, meander with elegiac murmurings upon a bed of gold dust; young zephyrs gently wave their wings like fans and spread through the air a delightful coolness. The echoes are the most ingenious and the very best bred in the world; they are always ready to reply with some delightful assonance to the stanzas addressed to them, and they never fail to reply, to the lover who asks them whether his mistress feels for him in the torments which he has to endure, sure — for in this fairyland the natural rime to mistress is tigress. Charming little lambs, curled and powdered, with a pink ribbon and a

silver bell around their necks, leap in cadence and dance a minuet to the sound of the pipes and tabors. The shepherds wear high-heeled shoes adorned with prodigious rosettes, heavily braided kilts, and ribbons all over their persons. The shepherdesses spread upon the sward satin skirts adorned with knots and wreaths. As for the wolves, they discreetly keep out of the way, and their black noses scarcely ever show from the wings save to afford Celadon an opportunity of saving the divine Astræa. This happy country is situated between the realm of Tendre and the country of Cocaigne, and long since the road that leads to it has been forgotten. It is a pity. I should very much like to have gone to see it; Rousseau long wanted to; but it seems that the real Forez is a most prosaic district with iron-works, where a locksmith easily finds occupation. O imagination of the poets! How cruel are the deceptions you prepare for us!

For the rest, these shepherds resemble in no wise the shepherds of Theocritus and Virgil. It is no longer Phyllis or Amaryllis or Thestilis who are crushing garlic for the harvesters, not even the Chloe of Longus's romance, or Theano, or any of these ladies. It is an entirely different cycle, that one of which d'Urfé's

book is the central point; it is a Spanish, a Romantic period. It is an entirely different shepherd population; the names have other roots and are not composed in the same way. Daphnis is called Florintor; Menalcus, Taraminte; Tityrus, Alphause, or Lisimant; the Galatea who takes refuge behind the willows is changed into Isomène or Luciane. The antique simplicity of the antique eclogue would seem rather tasteless to these refined people. Their conversations are regular symposia, full of points in which the most refined preciosity sends out right and left its tendrils and its strange flowers whose perfume intoxicates, — preciosity, that fair French flower, which bloomed so beautifully in the pattern flower-beds of the gardens of the old school, and which Molière so wickedly trampled under foot in I forget what immortal bad little play.

The plot of the pastoral introduced into "The Comedy of Comedians" is rather pretty. Pirandre adores Melisée, who, in order to test the depth of his passion, feigns to receive favourably another shepherd named Florintor. On his part Pirandre, in order to awaken the jealousy of Melisée and pique her self-love, pays attentions to fair Isomène, who receives him very pleasantly; apparently, at least, for she does it only to

conceal her game, and her true lover is that same Florintor, the fictitious lover of Melisée, whom Isomène's parents do not approve of. The scenes and situations which result from such an imbroglio can easily be imagined. The comedy parents make up their minds that their children shall be happy and married without further delay; Pirandre shall wed Isomène, Florintor Melisée. The poor lovers, who are caught in the very trap which they have set and in the very lime of their own cleverness, do not welcome this news with much enthusiasm. As in those days the idea of duty was all-powerful and the father excessively feared, the lovers dare not inform their respective parents of the deceit which they have practised, and they agree to meet on the banks of the Lignon for a last interview, after which they will celebrate their wedding in its cold watery bed by drowning themselves. Happily the parents, who suspect something, have followed them, and concealing themselves behind one of those leafy and propitious trees which are never lacking in a comedy, they have heard the whole of the conversation. Touched by so much love, they issue from their retreat and unite the four lovers in their natural order, that is, Pirandre with Melisée, Florintor with Isomène. They had many

children. The author does not say so, but I take it for granted.

M. de Blandimare speaks to the public a sort of compliment in prose, which introduces the final couplet, and the piece ends. I fancy the description of an actress's dressing-room in 1635 will be read with pleasure. It is complete in itself, and can readily be detached from the rest. It is Beausoleil who speaks: —

"As our rooms are so far like temples that they are open to everybody, for one well-bred person who visits us we have to endure the impertinences of very many ill-bred men. One will come and swing his legs for the whole afternoon upon a box without saying a word, simply to show us that he has got moustaches and knows how to curl them. Another, somewhat less of a dreamer, but no cleverer, will talk of nothing but trifles of as little value as his own wit; taking upon himself to be helpful, he will put a patch upon our bosom with the intention of feeling it, or will insist on holding the mirror, tying a knot of ribbon, or powdering our hair, and availing himself of the opportunity to speak of these things, he speaks of them with the stalest and flattest of witticisms. A third, pitching his voice too high and too loud for his prattle, heedlessly censures the poems which we have performed, — one wearies by its length; the action of another is weak; a third is dull and sterile of thoughts; another, on the contrary, suffering from a plethora of ideas, is involved and incomprehensible;

one is defective in that it does not conform to the rules of the ancients and thus exhibits the author's ignorance; another writer has mastered them too carefully, is cold and fails to impart action to his play; another speaks disconnectedly and incorrectly, and lacks the polish of the court; others again lack the ornaments of poetry; others abound over-much in fables and smack more of the pedant than of the well-bred man, more of oil than of ambergris, — in a word, not one escapes the tongue of that critic, who thinks censuring so many wits without hearing them in their own defence proves that he is as poor a judge of verse as are poor judges of the virtue of women those men who suspect us of having none."

Paul Scarron

VI
PAUL SCARRON

IN classical times, when writers endeavour to recover through study the severe and simple lines of the ancient poets, they often fall into regrettable excess, into dulness and dryness; they seem to be haunted by a wrong idea of what is a lofty style; the familiar frightens them, they write in a dialect as learned as that of the Brahmins. Good taste is a fine thing, but it must not be carried too far. Through excess of good taste very many subjects, details, images, and expressions which have all the flavour of life are lost. The beautiful rich tongue of the sixteenth century, picked over and winnowed by over-particular hands, seems to us to have lost, along with the few weeds which were removed from it, many ears full of golden grain. We are of those who regret that Malherbe came. A great and admirable poet, Mathurin Régnier, expressed somewhat the same thought in verse of surprising energy

and vigour. The influence of Louis XIV was not always beneficial to the literature and art of his time. The great king's periwig has too much part in them, majestic conventions and etiquette have rather driven out nature. The trees at Versailles are curled like the courtiers; the poems are laid out in straight lines, like the walks. Everywhere cold regularity has taken the place of the delightful variety of real life, and the will of a single man has been substituted for individual fancy. Louis XIV, who kindly allowed himself to be personified as the sun, loved splendour rather than art. He was not endowed with the quick intelligence of Julius II or Leo X. He knew that every great reign ought to possess a certain number of poets, prose writers, artists, architects, sculptors, and painters, and he procured the artists whom his glory required; for great kings make great artists, they have only to will; a pleasant look, a kind word, a handful of gold, are sufficient. That improvised art, however, revolved around Louis XIV alone, and aimed solely to please him. To please the king, to divert the king, to praise the king, to paint the king's portrait, to carve the king's statues, — such was the sole, the one and only thought; and as the king was

rather fond of somewhat stiff pomp, of somewhat affected solemnity, his taste set the fashion. Poetry always wore a court dress, and had a page to bear its train lest it should drop any of its gold brocade petticoats as it ascended the marble stairs of Versailles. An expression disallowed at court was shunned everywhere else. The d'Hoziers of grammar examined the title-deeds of each word, and such of them as happened to be of middle-class origin were pitilessly rejected. Painting, devoting itself to the production of show-pieces and the decoration of ceilings with mythological scenes, considered that the imitation of nature was beneath its dignity, for Nature had not been presented at court, Louis XIV having in everything, but especially in art, a horror of truth. The Flemish artists were most distasteful to him; he preferred Charles Lebrun, his chief painter, — a piece of royal taste which we must not dispute or discuss.

Out of all this was evolved a magnificent, grandiose, solemn art, but, — let us venture to say it, — save two or three glorious exceptions, a rather wearisome art, which produces an impression not unlike that made by the gardens of Le Nôtre or of La Quintinie; everywhere marbles and bronzes, Neptunes and Tritons

and nymphs, rockeries and basins, grottoes and colonnades, yew-trees in the shape of sugar loaves, box-wood in the shape of boats; whatever can be imagined most noble, most rich, most costly, and most impossible: but after you have walked for an hour or two, you feel a weariness settling down upon you like a fine rain, with the spray of the fountains; a dull melancholy invades your mind at the sight of those trees not one branch of which is higher than another, and whose irreproachable alignment would delight a Prussian landwehr drill-master. You begin, in spite of yourself, to wish you could come across some little bit of rustic landscape, — a clump of nut-trees by a peasant's hut, with its mossy roof covered with wall-flower in bloom; a peasant woman, a child in her arms, standing on the threshold of the door around which twines a wreath of vine; a washing-place at the brook-side down in the valley, under the bluish shade of the willows, enlivened by the chatter of the washerwomen and the sound of their bats; a rich meadow where graze, breast-high in waving grass, great red cows such as Paul Potter paints so well, and which, in courtly idylls, graze, under the euphonic name of heifers, on a sward of

green satin. Under the preceding reign the Gallic element was much more visible in literature through the mixture of Spanish and Italian. The Hellenic branch which Ronsard had grafted upon the old trunk of our idiom, nourished by the sap from the ground, had become one with the tree; there is not such a great difference as might be thought between the political discourses of the gentleman of Vendôme and certain tirades of Pierre Corneille. The language was charming; full of colour, simple, strong, heroic, fantastic, elegant, grotesque, lending itself to every fancy of the writer, and as well fitted to express the haughty Castilian manners of the Cid as to chalk upon the walls of pothouses spicy refrains of gluttony. The French mind, clever, malicious, sensible, accurate, but rather lacking in reverie, has always had a secret inclination to the grotesque; there is no nation which more quickly seizes upon the ridiculous side of things, and in the most serious it still finds an opportunity for a joke.

In the reign of Louis XIV there still prevailed in literature an adventurous taste, an audacity, a comic spirit, a cavalier style which were quite in harmony with the manners of the refined people of the time.

Neither words nor things were very closely examined, provided the touch was firm, the colour bold, and the drawing correct. The influence of Marini, Lalli, Caporali, Quevedo had given rise to innumerable burlesque compositions in which the quaintness of the subject-matter vies with the fancifulness of the expression. A big book could be made merely out of the titles of all the works which the reaction, at the head of which were Boileau and Racine, condemned to deep oblivion, from which they are drawn from time to time by the curiosity of a bibliophile or of a critic who hunts among what are called the minor poets for those characteristic features which talents of the first rank are apt to neglect or disdain. Paul Scarron is in some sort the Homer of this comic school; he sums up and incarnates it; he possessed even the outward physical appearance of his particular style. Byron, the head of the Satanic school, was club-footed, like the devil; Scarron, the chief of the burlesque school, was hunchbacked and deformed, like Punch. The eccentricity in his verse is reflected in the eccentricities of his backbone and his limbs. Ideas, like goldsmith's hammers, hammer out the external shape and force it into hollows and protuber-

ances as they choose. The name of Scarron is about the only one which has survived out of that whole company, and from time to time some of his plays are still read. Not that among the works of his fellows, hopelessly overwhelmed in the black waters of oblivion, one does not come upon passages as free in movement, as brightly comic and as skilfully written; but human memory, already overburdened with so many names, usually chooses one for each literary form and passes it on from age to age without further examination. An amusing occupation for any one having leisure enough and not afraid of traversing and sometimes going counter to the torrent of generally accepted belief, would be to revise the judgments passed upon a multitude of authors and artists by their contemporaries or by posterity, the latter not being always as equitable as is said. Most certainly more than one of these judgments would be reversed. Such a work, supported by documentary proof, would bring to light innumerable charming things in writers who have been condemned to reprobation and ridicule, and reveal at least as great a number of stupidities and platitudes in the works of writers who are everywhere quoted and lauded. All

the grotesque poets have not been fortunate enough, so far as their reputation was concerned, to leave a widow who was to become the wife of a King of France, and this strange stroke of luck has done a great deal to prevent the name of the author of "Don Japhet of Armenia" from being forgotten.

Scarron was born in Paris in 1610 or 1611. He belonged to an old family of good position which came from Moncallier in Piedmont, where is to be seen in the collegiate church a chapel founded about the beginning of the thirteenth century by Louis Scarron, who rests there under a tomb of white marble emblazoned with his arms. His father was Paul Scarron, a councillor in the High Court of Parliament, who enjoyed a fortune of 25,000 livres a year, — a very considerable sum for those times. It would now be worth more than double. There was a Pierre Scarron who was Bishop of Grenoble, and a Jean Scarron who was lord of Vaujour. There is nothing in all this suggestive of a poet and a buffoon; and, without fear of passing for a false prophet, an agreeable future might well have been predicted for the little Scarron and his two sisters, Anne and Françoise; yet that future, apparently so bright and

plain, did not keep its promises. Councillor Scarron lost his wife, and heedless of the kindness which heaven had done him by breaking an indissoluble knot, he was fool enough to marry a second time.

Françoise de Plaix bore him three more children, — two daughters, Madeleine and Claude, and a son Nicholas. You are aware that if there is nothing in the world to equal a mother, there is nothing so bad as a step-mother, save a mother-in-law; so Françoise de Plaix, like the regular step-mother she was, was not very fond of the children of the first marriage, and tried to favour her own with all she could get for them and for herself. Young Scarron, when he was quite a child, noticed these performances and did not hesitate to talk about them. He had no great affection for his family, and was not at all obliged to his father for presenting him with younger brothers who would diminish his inheritance by so much. He was already very free and caustic in speech, and launched at his step-mother stinging remarks which still further embittered the hatred that existed between them. In a word, he managed so well that it became impossible for him to remain in his father's house. The livelong day there was nothing

but trouble and quarrels, so that the councillor, a most worthy man but a very weak father, was obliged to sacrifice him for the sake of peace in the household and sent him to a relative at Charlevoix. He remained there a couple of years, and then, exile having softened the ferocious temper of his step-mother, he returned to Paris, where he finished his studies; after which he took orders — minor orders, although he had no vocation for the Church. His bilious and sanguine temperament fitted him rather for the activity of pleasure than for the tranquillity of meditative life, and he possessed none of the qualities required for the important functions of a priest; he was therefore satisfied with minor orders, which in no wise bound a man and did not even prevent him from wearing a sword and being an expert duellist, like the Abbé Gondi. The dress of the minor orders was a clean, natty, unprofessional, almost gallant costume, which merely meant that the person who wore it had literary pretensions and was looking for some benefice; for the rest, no men could be more lay and more free from prejudice than those in minor orders. Wearing their dress and followed by a lackey, they could present themselves anywhere without fear of incurring the

wrath of porters. Many a door which would have remained closed, opened of itself to the abbé; and provided he had a bright glance, good teeth, and a clever wit, he was welcomed by great lords and great ladies.

Possessing wit and a bright mind, of honourable family, and having some money from his father, Paul Scarron was bound to be successful in society. He frequented the gallant and witty company of the day; he was welcomed at Marion de Lorme's and Ninon de Lenclos', the two professional beauties of the day, who drew to their houses all the most illustrious and remarkable people, all the greatest names and the cleverest wits of the court and the town. There must have occurred in these great houses of the Place Royale and the Street des Tournelles — for at that time the Marais was the great and fashionable quarter — many a charming talk, many a piquant divagation on all sorts of subjects. The delicate epicureanism of St. Evremond, the sallies of Chapelle, the bacchanal jollity of Bachaumont, introduced into the conversation of the nobles a literary element which sufficed to prevent the commonplaceness of vulgar talk, without, however, falling into preciosity and incomprehensibility, as did the com-

pany of the Hôtel de Rambouillet. Scarron could only profit by such intercourse, and there is no doubt that he acquired there that freedom of pleasantry, that happy facility of joking, and that playfulness which, if it is not always in good taste, is at least never forced, and which brings a smile to lips the least inclined to laughter.

In the miscellaneous poems of Scarron are found two short pieces of verse, the one addressed to Marion de Lorme, the other to Ninon de Lenclos, which testify to his very friendly relations with these two famous courtesans. They are interesting in that they show us in what light their contemporaries looked upon these two rivals of Phryne and Aspasia. Here is the handsel addressed to Marion de Lorme: —

"Delight of the eyes and torture of the soul,
Beauty who every day light so many flames,
This little madrigal
For a New Year's gift is all that I can offer you.
But in return I ask of you,
That instead of giving me one,
Your eyes full of charms
Mine will kindly spare,
So that they may not burn me up
As so many another they have burned."

The next is addressed to Ninon: —

"O beauteous and charming Ninon,
Whom never shall one gainsay
Whatever she pleases to order,
So great is the authority
Enjoyed everywhere by the young
Who to wit beauty join :
On this first day of the New Year
I have nothing good enough or fine enough
To make into a gift for you.
With my good wishes be satisfied, —
And a headache then I consent to have
If from my very heart they do not come.
So to you, then, I wish, Ninon,
A not ill-tempered husband, handsome, good ;
Plenty of game, all Lent through,
Good Spanish wine and chestnuts large,
Plenty of money, lacking which every one is sad and dull,
And which all esteem as much as Scarron does."

To wish that Ninon should have a husband! rather a funny wish. What would she have done with one?

Our young poet lived thus until he was twenty-four, giving serious thought to nothing save pleasure, and wrapped up in the charms of numerous intrigues. In those days it was considered proper for every young man in society to make a trip to Italy. Scarron did not fail to follow the fashion. He was in Rome in 1634, and there met Maynard, the poet. The sight

of the noble ruins, the solemn melancholy of the city, in which every stone calls up remembrances in which the past overwhelms the present, made no impression whatever on young Scarron; picturesqueness did not affect him. He looked at the city of the Cæsars in the same way as did Saint-Amant, who, however, had to a high degree a feeling for the marvels of art and of nature. He returned from Rome as he had gone to it, and his vocation for the Church does not seem to have been increased by a close view of the Pope, the cardinals, and the monks.

Scarron was not always the victim of gout, the cripple, the hollow-chested and hump-backed paralytic who grimaces on the frontispiece of his works. In an epistle to the reader who has never seen him, he speaks thus of his past and of his present condition: —

"Reader, you who have never seen me, and do not regret it, because there is no great profit in seeing a person shaped as I am, know that I should not care to have you see me, had I not learned that certain officious wits amuse themselves at the expense of wretched me and depict me as being quite different from what I am. Some say that I am a cripple; others that I have no thighs, and that I am placed in a sheath on the table,

where I chatter like a blind magpie; others that my hat is hung from a cord that runs through a pulley, and that I pull it up and down to salute those who pay me visits. I feel conscientiously that I am bound to prevent their lying any longer, and that is why I have caused to be made the engraving placed at the beginning of my book. You will grumble, no doubt, — for every reader grumbles, and I grumble like everybody else when I am the reader, — you will grumble, I say, and you will object to my giving you only a back view of myself. Certainly it is not because I want to turn my back upon the company, but only because my convex back is better fitted to bear an inscription than my concave stomach which is overhung by my drooping head, and because from that side, as well as from the other, the topography, or rather, the irregular plan of my person can be seen. Without claiming to make a present to the public, for I swear by the nine Muses that I have never ventured to hope that my head would be reproduced upon a medal, I would willingly have had my portrait painted if any painter had dared to undertake it. For the lack of a portrait by a painter, I shall tell you pretty much what I am like.

"I am over thirty-eight, as you can see on the back of my chair, and if I live to be forty I shall add a good deal of suffering to what I have already borne for eight or nine years past. I had a good figure, though small; disease has made me shorter by a foot. My head is rather too large for my body; my face is round enough, though my body is thin; I have hair enough not to have to wear a wig, and I have a great many white hairs in spite of the proverb. Although my eyes, which are blue, are large, I enjoy pretty good sight; one of my eyes is more sunken than the other, on the side to which my head falls; my nose is rather well-shaped; my teeth, which were formerly like square pearls, are now the colour of wood, and soon will be slate-coloured; I have lost one and a half on the left side and two and a half on the right, and there are other two which are somewhat chipped. My legs and thighs, at first, made an obtuse angle, then a right angle, then an acute angle; my thighs and my body make another, and as my head falls upon my stomach, I am not unlike the letter Z. My arms as well as my legs have been drawn up, my fingers also;—in a word, I am a crumpled up specimen of human wretchedness. That is just about what I am like. Since I have started on

this fine business, I may as well tell you something of my temper; besides, this introduction is written merely to swell out the book by the request of the bookseller, who was afraid that it would not pay for the printing; otherwise it would be very unnecessary, — just as much as many others. But this is not the first time that people have done foolish things out of kindness, besides those which they do for themselves.

"I have always been somewhat hot-headed, somewhat of a gourmand, somewhat lazy. I often call my valet a fool, and a minute later I call him 'sir.' I hate no one, — God grant that no one hate me! I am very happy when I have got money, but I should be still happier if I had health. I rather enjoy company; I am pretty well satisfied when I am alone; I bear my ills fairly patiently — But it seems to me that my introduction is rather long, and it is time that I should bring it to a close."

In a letter to Marigny, he says: "When I think that I enjoyed good health until I was twenty-seven years old, — health enough to have drunk like a German even!" His "Typhon" contains a passage in which the poet speaks of the beginning of his trouble,

which came upon him at the time of the birth of Louis XIV. This is the passage: —

> "I have been a martyr ever since
> From the most adorable body
> Of our Queen, whom I love so much,
> Came forth Louis XIV,
> Louis called the God-given,
> For France's hap well born."

Louis XIV was born in 1638, so Scarron was about twenty-eight when he lost his health and gained his talent.

It was some time after he returned from Rome that he felt the first of the strange pains from which he suffered without respite to the day of his death. The cause of his illness is not very clear. According to one account, probably apocryphal, Scarron took it into his head during the carnival to disguise himself as a bird. In carrying out this notion, he first of all stripped himself naked and rubbed himself all over with honey; after which he ripped open a feather-bed, and rolled himself in it so that the down of the feathers stuck to his skin and gave him the appearance of a real bird. Thus feathered he paid several visits to houses where the joke was thought most amusing and in the best of

taste. But the heat causing the honey to melt, the feathers began to come off and betrayed the nakedness of Scarron, to the great scandal of the populace, who started to pursue him. Terrified by the shouting, he took to flight and concealed himself in a swamp, where he sank up to his neck. The cold of the water struck home, and he was seized with rheumatism which twisted his limbs and made him impotent and a cripple. Less kindly contemporaries, such as Tallemant des Réaux and Cyrano de Bergerac, attributed this sickness to another cause, to which the somewhat licentious life led by the young abbé lends a good deal of probability. In those days remedies were often worse than the disease; men were sometimes cured of the one, they were not always cured of the others. We may suppose that Scarron was not at first so much of a cripple as he later became. The kindly biographers merely state that a caustic lymph attacked his nerves and reduced him to a state of continuous suffering. So the epitaph which the poor devil composed for himself, and in which one meets with the thought underlying the inscription on the tomb of Trivulcius, *Hic quiescit qui numquam quievit*, *tace*, is more truthful than that kind of verse usually is: —

"He who now sleeps here
Excited pity more than envy,
And suffered death a thousand times
Before he lost his life.
Make no noise, O passer-by,
Beware of waking him ;
For this is the very first night
That poor Scarron sleep has known."

The Stoics denied the existence of pain and supported it with constancy, with a determined insensibility with which the pride of their school and the obstinacy imparted by their doctrine had perhaps more to do than real resignation. To suffer and not complain is no doubt a very fine thing, but it takes a great deal more strength of soul to turn one's tortures into jokes, to draw from the subject innumerable buffooneries, and to smile in the presence of very ill luck. To turn one's suffering into derision without seeking to provoke the pity of others, — pity, that "balm of the unhappy" — to play that part for many long years, without the cry of anguish breaking in upon the bursts of laughter, seems to us much more truly philosophical than all the empty declamations of the Sophists. We would like very much to see burlesque verses by Zeno written during an attack of sciatica or rheumatism ; I

doubt whether they would be found to contain the least approach to a joke.

The burlesque style, of which Scarron is unquestionably not the inventor, but in which he excelled and which he summed up, as it were, has had both admirers and detractors. The word *burlesque* in itself is not very ancient, it does not appear much before 1640 or 1650; before that time it had not crossed the Pyrenees. Sarrazin, says Ménage, was the first to make use of it in France, where nevertheless the thing it represents existed, but it was then designated by the term *grotesque*. The etymology of "grotesque" is *grutta*, a name given to those rooms of antiquity which have been brought to light by excavations, and the walls of which were covered with animals ending in foliage, winged chimeras, genii issuing from the calyxes of flowers, palaces of strange architecture, and many another caprice and fantasy. "Burlesque" comes from the Italian *burla*, which means a joke, a piece of fun, and from which are derived *burlesco* and *burlare*. *Burla*, adopted by the Italians, is originally a Castilian word. *Burladores* is the name given in Spain to jets of water concealed in the grass, which suddenly spring up under foot and soak unsuspecting pedestrians.

The comedy of Tirso de Molina, which is the model Molière used for his "Don Juan," bears for its title, *El Burlador de Sevilla*, the word having in its Spanish meaning a more derisive and ironical significance; for he who invites a stone statue to sup with him may be a mocker, but unquestionably he is no buffoon. This style came into general use. Since the days of Panurge especially, and even a good while before, France has been above all others the country of imitation; for the French, who are so bold on the field of battle and in perilous situations, are extremely timid on paper, and our nation, so mad and so frivolous, as observers say, is the one which has always preserved the deepest respect for rules and which has been least venturesome in literature. The moment they take a pen in their hands the French, who are so rash, are filled with hesitation and anxiety; they tremble lest they shall essay something new, not to be found in authors of the fashionable air. So, if an author becomes popular, immediately a multitude of books made after the fashion of his own appear. It would be wrong to attribute this spirit of imitation to the lack of invention or of individual capacity; it is merely a deference to fashion, a fear of appearing to be

wanting in taste. France is about the only country where the word *original* applied to an individual is almost an insult. Every Frenchman who writes is a prey to the fear of ridicule; and that is why, when a style or a literary *genre* has been adopted by the public, all the authors adopt it, glad to be relieved of the responsibility of having a style of their own. The fact that the success of a work gives rise to a group of works of the same kind is no new thing. Every period has a popular poem or novel of which numerous imitations are produced; and it would be an interesting piece of work to write the history of these kindred families. For this reason our literature is poorer than any other in eccentric works, the general tone being met with in the greater number of contemporary writers, and the particular colour of every period being due to a particular success. Scarron's success let loose a perfect flood of burlesque poetry, or rather of verses which claimed to be burlesque. Subjects least fitted to pleasantry were treated in this way. Brébeuf himself, the pompous author of "Pharsalia," wrote the coldest and most wearisome parody of Lucan, so widespread was the taste for burlesque. Every one dabbled in it, even the footmen and the ladies' maids;

for most people thought that it was quite enough to string together burlesque rimes, extravagant and coarse words, — in a word, to speak the tongue of the market-place, — to become a comic poet. The octosyllabic verse with simple rimes, which Scarron almost invariably made use of and in which he wrote "Typhon" and "Virgil Travestied," offers facilities which it is difficult not to take advantage of. In the hands of a mediocre versifier it soon becomes looser and less elevated than careless prose, and offers naught to compensate the ear but a rime which wearies by its immediate repetition. When well handled, this verse (which is that in which the Spanish romances and comedies are written) is capable of producing new and varied effects. To us it seems better fitted than the pompous and redundant alexandrine to familiar dialogue, to bright details, and we wish it could be used on the stage. It would save us many a stereotyped hemistich, which the best and most careful poets can scarcely get rid of, so surely do the indispensable cæsura and the rime of hexameter verse compel their use. The octosyllabic verse, in consequence of its being used especially for buffooneries, was called the burlesque verse, although it lends itself equally well to

noble and serious expression. It is in that metre that worthy Loret, the journalist of his time, wrote his "Historic Muse."

The burlesque, or, if you prefer it, the grotesque, has always existed both in art and nature, as a contrast and a set-off. The world is full of animals the nature and existence of which are inexplicable save by the law of opposition; their ugliness evidently serves to bring out the beauty of the higher and nobler beings. But for the demon, the angel would not be as splendid as he is, and the toad makes the beauty of the humming-bird more remarkable and striking. Life is manifold, and many heterogeneous elements enter into the make-up of facts and events. The most touching situation has its comical side, and laughter often breaks out through tears. Any art, therefore, which seeks to be true, is bound to admit both sides. Tragedy and comedy are too arbitrary in their exclusiveness; no action can be wholly terrifying or wholly amusing. There are very comical sides to the most serious events, and very sad ones to the most farcical adventures. Tragedy and comedy are therefore classical poems, since, in accordance with conventions settled on beforehand, they reject the

expression of certain feelings and certain ideas. The somewhat dry, clear-cut French mind accepts readily enough these divisions and compartments in the domain of art. Weep or laugh, then, through five acts, if you like; but that desire for harmony and regularity can be satisfied only through the sacrifice of colour and tone. The result is a monochrome literature which resembles the combats of gladiators painted in red ochre of which Horace speaks, or the camaieu paintings with which the artists of the last century adorned panels and bays. One poem is blue, another green; the modelling is brought out, as in gray monochromes, by the contrast of light and shade; in neither are the varied tints of nature harmoniously combined. We shall not, because we happen to be speaking of Scarron, re-state here the thesis of the grotesque so eloquently maintained in a famous preface. From the time of Malherbe the French language has been the victim of an absolutely amazing fit of prudery and preciosity as regards ideas and expressions. Every detail was proscribed as being familiar, every word in ordinary use as being low or prosaic. Writers came to use some five or six hundred words only, and the literary language was, by com-

parison with the ordinary tongue, like an abstract dialect for the sole use of scholars. Side by side with this highly aristocratic and disdainful poetry arose a style thoroughly in opposition to it, but certainly just as false, the burlesque, which insisted on looking only at the deformed and grimacing aspect of things, carefully seeking triviality, and making use of popular or ridiculous expressions only. It was the opposite excess, that is all. We willingly accept buffoonery, the invention of comic details, the lightsomeness of style, the delightful strangeness of words, the unexpectedness and comicality of rimes, and the wildest fancies in every style of writing; but we confess we cannot understand parody and travesty. "Virgil Travestied," one of Scarron's chief works, which gained him his reputation, is unquestionably one of those which we least like, although it is full of amusing hits and droll lines. For what does it mean, after all? To substitute for the hero a dull, clownish cit, for a fair princess a coarse kitchen wench, and to make these characters speak the language of the market-place, is not in itself a very amusing performance. There is no masterpiece which could not, by applying this process, be made as dull as ditchwater.

We can understand parody in the critical sense; that is, by making use of a certain humorous exaggeration to bring out the defects of the work travestied, to make the ridicule or the danger of it more striking, as in "Don Quixote," when the hero speaks of Amadis of Gaul, of Galaor, Agesilan of Colchos, Lancelot of the Lake, Esplandian, and other romances of chivalry. We have seen the parodies of all the plays which have met with success for the past ten years, and although it is true that there is, even in the least envious of men, a little feeling of malevolence which makes him listen with a certain satisfaction to pleasantries directed against a popular tragedy or drama, we must confess we have never derived the least enjoyment from these performances. Scarron, by the way, shared our opinion about parodies, and the manner in which he speaks of them in a letter to M. Deslandes-Payen, to whom he dedicates the fifth canto of "Virgil Travestied," proves a modesty which is almost unjust: "I am ready to declare under my hand and seal, in the presence of whomsoever you please, that the paper which I use up in writing is so much spoilt paper, and that one would be justified in asking me, as was asked of Ariosto, where I find so

many. . . . And these parodies of books, my own 'Virgil' first and foremost, are nothing but . . . and it is a bad omen for the compilers of coarse words, for those who have attacked Virgil, those who have attacked me, like a poor dog who is gnawing his bone, and those who indulge in that form of writing as being the easiest, — it is, I say, a very bad omen for these most fire-deserving burlesques that this year, which has produced them in such numbers and which perhaps has been as much troubled by them as by chafers, should not have produced an abundance of corn. Perhaps the best minds, which have been enrolled to keep our language clean and sweet, will regulate the matter, and the punishment of the first joker who shall be convicted of having relapsed into the burlesque, and therefore condemned to work the rest of his life for the idlers of the New Bridge, will dispel the regrettable storm of burlesque which threatens the realm of Apollo. For my part, I am always ready to abjure a style which has spoilt every one; and but for the express order of a person of rank who has full power over me, I should leave 'Virgil' to those who want it so much, and I should be satisfied with my fruitless post of invalid,

which is more than sufficient to keep a whole man busy."

It appears from this letter that Scarron did not lack for imitators and copyists, and that he had to fight for his parody of "Virgil." The method of publication that he had adopted favoured frauds by writers who wished to continue the work. At first he was to have published one canto a month, but whether suffering prevented his doing so, or whether — which is more likely — he got sick and weary of the work, he did not punctually fulfil his engagement, and there were long delays between the times of the publication of the different parts of his poem. To keep up so prolonged a joke certainly needs all the spirit of Scarron, his masterly skill in handling the octosyllabic line, his readiness in inventing unexpected rimes and piquant turns, suspensions, bold overlappings, curious cæsuras, — in a word, whatever can vary such a long work. Even in the midst of innumerable incongruities, each more startling than its predecessor, occur passages really well written, the familiar literalness of which reproduces the antique very much better than the serious translations in a fine style. Judicious remarks comment the text. "'Be just and fear the

gods.' This maxim is sound and good, but of what use is it in hell?" It is impossible to ridicule more wittily the famous line, —

"Discite justitiam moniti et non temnere divos!"

"The Æneid Travestied" was never carried beyond the eighth canto. The "Comic Romance" itself is unfinished, either through caprice or fatigue. We rather like those interrupted books which compel the imagination of the reader to invent the close.

The "Virgil" was continued, if it may be called continued, by a certain Jaques Moreau, Marquis or Count of Brazey, and by another writer whose name has remained unknown. It is difficult to read anything flatter, more vulgar, and more insipid. Offray did not meet with much more success in his continuation of the "Comic Romance." The immortal author of "Don Quixote," Don Miguel Cervantes de Saavedra, having allowed a long interval to elapse between the publication of the first and the latter part of his novel, suffered also from the unpleasantness of having his work continued by a sacrilegious scribbler; but Cid Hamet-Ben-Engeli hung his pen so high up that no one since then has been able to take it down.

"Typhon," which was composed before "Virgil Travestied," is a burlesque poem on the war of the gods and the giants. It contains five cantos in octosyllabic verse. If ever there was a sinister and grandiose mythological personage, it surely is the shapeless monster which Juno, jealous of her husband's creation, — he having brought forth Pallas alone, — caused to spring from the ground. His gigantic revolt has a mysterious and cosmogonic character as terrifying as the *bassi-relievi* carved in the caves of Ellora, which represent events the memory and symbolical meaning of which have been lost, but which one feels must have been terrible. Typhon nearly made heaven and earth change places. He slashed off Jupiter's legs and arms with a diamond scythe, and filled the inhabitants of Olympus with such panic terror that, in order to escape, they assumed the shape of animals or of vegetables, under which forms they were worshipped by the Egyptians. His aspect was formidable and monstrous. He had a hundred heads, and from his hundred mouths came forth flames and such awful cries that gods and men trembled at the sound. The principal part of his body was covered with feathers, the lower part spread out into dragon's-tails. This

giant, repulsive though he was, managed to marry, and by Echidna, his spouse, had a whole hideous family of monsters: Orcus, Cerberus, the Lernean Hydra, the Chimæra, the Sphinx, the Nemæan lion. Finally Jupiter, having recovered his legs and arms, thanks to the skill of Mercury and Pan, sprang on a car drawn by winged horses and hurled his lightnings so fiercely and constantly at Typhon that he overthrew him; and, to prevent his rising again, he placed upon his breast Mount Ætna, which since then has never ceased to hurl against heaven, as a mark of contempt and revolt, blasts of flame, rocks, torrents of lava, and whirlwinds of smoke.

Now, here is how Scarron has caricatured the epic subject and reproduced the colossal struggle.

At the opening of the poem the gods are feasting in a macaronic Olympus after the manner of the country of Cocaigne; they have drunk more nectar than is good for them and have surfeited themselves with ambrosia. Jupiter is asleep with his head on the table; Juno is stretched out on her couch with very little on her; Mars, who has just come from Flanders, is drinking beer and smoking tobacco like a regular trooper. As for Venus, she is ogling a young, beard-

less god, whom she proposes to initiate into the mysteries of love.

Typhon and his friends the giants are also enjoying themselves on earth in their own fashion. They are playing at skittles in the fields of Thessaly. You understand, of course, that the nine-pins of these fellows are no mere children's toys; they are huge rocks — as high as the steeple of Strasburg Cathedral — which Typhon has rooted up with his powerful hands and roughly fashioned into shape. A huge piece of a mountain scarcely rough-hewn serves as a bowl. The bowling party causes earthquakes all through the countryside. The giants, however, have not yet warmed up; they are playing carefully, as is the way at first. Little by little the game becomes more animated, and Mimas, hurling the bowl, hits Typhon's foot just upon his tender corn. Typhon, crazed with pain but unable to blame Mimas, who did not do it on purpose, picks up the nine-pins and hurls them into the air with such vigour that they break through the blue vault of heaven and fall upon the dresser of the gods, smashing all the glass-ware and china. Jupiter wakes with a start at the crash of the broken crockery, and asks in a transport of rage what such a bacchanalian performance

means. "Your Majesty," replies Pallas, "it is the work of some frightful engine directed from the earth against the heavens, which has caused the damage on your dresser. All the glasses are broken, and hereafter we shall have to drink out of the palms of our hands like beggars or cynical philosophers." "It is nine-pins and a bowl," adds Momus, the pretty buffoon. "So," says Jupiter, "heaven can be broken into! It can be burst open as if it were a paper ceiling. We are no longer safe in this azure concern. The sons of earth are becoming more and more insolent, but I shall take them down pretty quickly. I shall thunder and hail and rain on them in such fashion that they will soon return to their duty."

The conversation has reached this point when enters Apollo, who has finished his day's work, stabled his nags, and put his car in the barn. Naturally he is better informed than any one of what happens on earth, which, in virtue of his rank as Grand Duke of the Candles (a title given to him by Dubartas), it is his business to illumine. He saw Typhon, who was playing with his company in Thessaly, hurling the nine-pins toward heaven. "That rascal is making me mad at last, and I am getting pretty Olympically angry,"

says Jupiter, bending his moleskin brows. "Here, Mercury, put on as quickly as you can your winged shoes — they have just been re-soled; and you go and tell that scamp that if he does not keep quiet he will have me to deal with." The son of Cyllene puts on his travelling-cap, ties his wings on his feet with a piece of stout cord, takes his stick entwined with eels, bows like a chorister boy, and is off. He flashes through the air, traverses the clouds, and stops upon Helicon only to have a bite and a sup. There he finds the Nine Muses busy sifting rondeaus, winnowing sonnets, and picking out "Joys" and "Regrets." It is natural to old maids and devotees to practise the manufacture of preserves, so the Muses present Mercury with a pot of cherries and the remains of a pasty which Apollo had cut into the night before. When Mercury has eaten, he wipes his mouth with the back of his hand, like a well-bred god who has not been furnished with a napkin, and he starts off again at the double to fulfil his commission.

At dusk he reaches the place where are the giants. It is still light enough to see, but Night soon shakes out her skirts spangled with stars. The rascals are in a plain not far from a forest, building a huge pile, on

which they propose to grill some meat. The whole forest is cut down for the purpose. It makes a vast heap of knotty oaks, of branching pines, of uprooted elms, so that one might well believe they proposed to burn down the earth. Hundreds of oxen, still yoked to the ploughs and cut in quarters, are roasting on that ocean of coals; thousands of sheep, stuck like larks upon spits made of whole cypresses, are turning slowly in front of the fire. The supper must have caused a whole nation to starve.

The giants surround Mercury, who does not feel particularly brave when he sees closing around him that band of monstrous bodies. However, he summons up all his courage and addresses the following speech to Typhon, who looks at him crossly and with his most frightful mien: "Sir Typhon, in spite of your giant size you are only a big rascal. Jove, my master and yours, has sent me to tell you that you have got to keep yourselves quiet henceforth, otherwise he will unhesitatingly smite you with lightnings. You have smashed up all our crockery, and you have got to start at once for Venice to fetch a hundred glasses to replace those broken by your nine-pins. Who breaks, pays, — you are drunkard enough to know that maxim.

You have a week to do it in, but not another minute. And now, good-night."

Mercury has scarcely ended his speech when a formidable howl, fit to deafen the four elements, issues from mouths bigger than ovens, from chests deeper than caverns. Mercury nearly bleeds at the ears from it, like a gunner who has been firing the whole day. "Get out of this quickly, you ass, you fool, or I will push you alive into the fire!" shouts Typhon. "I laugh at your master and his fireworks and crackers." Thereupon the colossus begins to devour, with his band, mountains of half-grilled flesh, and soon goes to sleep by the dying fire, after having put under his head, by way of a pillow, a rock which fifty thousand men could not budge.

Poor Mercury, much terrified, climbs a tree, in which he perches till the return of dawn, the roads not being very safe, and infested with highwaymen. Day having come he gets off his perch and starts on his way. He finds Jupiter still in bed, but the god scarcely takes time to put on a dressing-gown, so eager is he to learn the news brought from earth by his messenger. "All I could get in reply," says Mercury to the master of the gods, "was impertinence. The insolent fellows

laughed in my face, and they very nearly played practical jokes upon me. Typhon in particular received me as if I had been a peddler. May I be smitten with seven-years itch if I have not said the truth, as naked as when it rose out of its well."

The council of the gods is assembled, and the question as to whether active measures shall be taken or not is discussed. The giants also are consulting and stirring. Enceladus, whose name rimes so happily in French with escalade, insists upon fetching Jupiter out of his aerial cubbyhole, and proposes to turn out all the inhabitants of the starry mansions; he does not need any one to help him in this enterprise, he will himself have all the danger and all the glory. Typhon joyfully listens to his bluster, and the whole giant band shouts in acquiescence. Mimas brays with delight; Porphyrion stretches out his wild-beast's claws; Polybotes, with a snout like a whale's, grunts heavily; Asius, the great bear-slayer, Thaon, Ephialtes, Coeus, Iapetus, Echion, Almops, all shout as if they were mad, "Long live Typhon! Death to the gods!"

Meanwhile Jupiter curses and swears in his Olympus like a carter in a hollow road in Lower Brittany. The stock of ammunition is inspected, and proves to

be not very considerable; Mercury, the factotum, is therefore sent off to the vapour-producing god. This deity refuses at first to give clouds on credit, for a large amount is already owing him, — no one being paid in heaven; yet in view of the urgent danger, he replies that he will send up enough to satisfy Master Jove. Mercury, on his way, puts into his pocket the "Gazette" and the "Extra," which contain information about the forces of the giants.

The council of the gods resembles very much a terrestrial council. The members dispute upon the order of their going and precedence. Neptune, who is no great orator and is only good at grumbling, gets tangled up in his speech. Mars plays the part of Captain Slasher, the mountain-slicer; with the mere wind of his sword he will overthrow the army of the giants. Vulcan offers to make such complicated gratings and locks for the windows and doors of Olympus that Typhon will break his nails on them. The day is wasted in ridiculous discussions, and Jupiter adjourns the meeting. Every one returns to his own place without matters having progressed in the least.

At the beginning of the third canto Apollo sends up the clouds called for. They are clouds of the best

quality, full of nitre, sulphur, and rosin; the air is darkened by them; never was a London fog so thick. Under cover of those clouds, which prevent the earth being seen from heaven, Enceladus begins to pile up one mountain on another like a mason laying bricks. He heaps Pelion on Ossa, and makes such a prodigious pile that he gets as high as the lodging of the Olympians, the walls of which he reaches by means of a flying bridge. Jupiter, wanting to find out what kind of weather it is outside, opens a window and is horribly scared at finding himself face to face with the monstrous giant. Happily, the window is too narrow for the latter to pass through. Jupiter shouts, "Help, help!" calls for his powder-box, rolls up his shirt-sleeves, and prepares to launch a thunderbolt at the giant's head; but the latter, seeing his danger, shoves into the window the huge trunk of a cedar. Jupiter narrowly escapes being spitted and stuck against the wall like an owl on a gamekeeper's door. The alarm is given. The gods cast over the battlements of the celestial ramparts faggots, lumps of plaster, stools, liquids of all sorts except scents, and pans full of boiling butter. Enceladus is hit on the mouth by one, and although the butter is very hot, it cools his courage and

induces him to give up his place to Mimas, who, being rather thinner, succeeds in making his way through the opening.

The battle now becomes general. Jupiter mounts his eagle and heads a sortie, accompanied by all the gods. His lightnings at first terrify the giants, but they are more scared than hurt. Mars and Enceladus challenge each other to single combat; they turn out to be so formidable that they turn their backs upon each other after an exchange of insults like Homeric heroes. During the battle an old gipsy succeeds in sending to Jupiter by a footman a letter couched thus: "Tiresias and Proteus have foretold that this war can end to the glory of the gods only through the help of the son of a mortal woman. Such is the decree of fate." This piece of information causes deep discouragement throughout Olympus, and the gods are already beaten when Typhon returns with fresh giants clad in armour of stone. The rout is complete, and Jupiter takes to his heels, shouting, "Save himself who can!" The gods and goddesses follow his example, sprinting like Basques or record runners. To escape the huge rascals, who are following them with strides longer than Jack the Giant Killer's with his seven-leagued boots,

they are obliged to conceal themselves by assuming the shapes of animals. Jupiter turns into a ram, Juno into a cow, as she is entitled to do through her name βοῶπις; Neptune into a greyhound, Momus into a monkey, Apollo into a crow, Bacchus into a goat, Pan into a rat, Diana into a cat, Venus into a kid, Mercury into a stork. The giants, who are naturally rather dull, do not know what has become of their enemies, and while they are looking for them, these, protected by their disguise, succeed in reaching the banks of the Nile, where they will wait for a change of fortune and for the time when they shall have a chance to punish that impious and brutal race.

The celestial company approaches Memphis. Jupiter, who is not used to wearing wool, is very warm and perspires freely. He drags himself painfully along; he has run a thorn into his foot, and falls helplessly on the tender grass. In this attitude he bleats out a harangue in Greek, and directs Mercury to steal some clothes, if possible, to enter the near-by town and to fetch some garments for the gods: the pearl necklace which Venus has kept on, will defray the cost.

Mercury, still under the appearance of a stork, flies to the banks of the Nile, where some natives are en-

gaged in bathing and in looking for crocodile's eggs. The god of thieves, who naturally is a past master in stealing, seizes a tunic and assumes his own form, under which he enters Memphis. He loads a mule with a regular second-hand stock of doublets, cloaks, skirts, and drawers, which the gods put on after having thrown off their animal disguises. They put up at an inn, the host of which is a cuckold and his wife a coquette, quite a likely alliteration and connection. Soon their godhead reveals itself by a symptom which you will never guess, and the whole responsibility of which we leave to Scarron's buffoonery — the mysterious travellers are noticeable for the delightful odour which they exhale. This peculiarity so greatly surprises the inhabitants of the town that they thereupon do not hesitate to believe their guests divine beings. It should be added that they walk, or rather glide, without raising their feet, as if they were skating, which is a distinctive attribute of the higher powers. The priests of Memphis, informed of these facts, bring to the celestial strangers four puncheons of genuine balm, fish from the Nile, crocodiles, hippopotami, and two pairs of cleaned gloves.

Hereupon Hercules, who had been busy somewhere else, joins the celestial band, which his arrival cheers

up, and Mercury is again despatched to spy out what the giants are doing. He finds them still heaping mountains on mountains and turning Thessaly into a perfect break-neck country. Typhon has raised his platform so high that the giants will soon be able to sit down on Jupiter's throne; but he has reckoned without his host. The celestial army arrives quietly, followed by carts filled with ammunition manufactured in Memphis. Jupiter hurls a thunderbolt, merely, however, to effect a diversion and to conceal the real attack. The colossi, half asleep, turn out of bed in their drawers, and hurry in the direction where the thunder is pealing. While they are rubbing with their fingers, which are as big as pillars, their eyes, which are as big as bucklers, the gods invade their camp and soon the mêlée becomes general. The most terrific blows are exchanged. Several of the giants are killed, greatly to their annoyance, considering that they never have been dead before that time; and after many ups and downs, the giants' army is routed, thanks to the valour of Hercules, who was born of a mortal woman, and the gipsy's prediction is fulfilled. Typhon, springing from summit to summit, legs it over the boot of Italy and escapes to Sicily, whither Jupiter pursues

him, overthrows him, and sticks Mount Ætna like a nightmare on his chest, greatly to his discomfort. Ever since, when Typhon coughs an eruption takes place; when he turns over an earthquake occurs.

"And thus almost always is vice
Duly punished at the last
And never did rebellion
Its punishment escape."

The gigantomachia, of which we have given a succinct summary, is full of amusing lines, of naïve expressions, of idioms unmistakably native. It is to be regretted that the prudish taste which rules at present and which does not permit the least freedom of style, even in a purely philosophical and literary study, forbids our quoting the brightest and drollest traits. Of yore the French language did not set such high store on seemliness in words as it does nowadays. Our old story-tellers were allowed a freedom of speech which no one could indulge in to-day, and in the facetious style we count a great many masterpieces. Rabelais, Béroalde de Verville, the Queen of Navarre, Bonaventure Des Periers, wrote in a striking manner and in an uncommon style, of which La Fontaine's "Tales" give but a very dim idea. It is in the works

of these authors that the real Gallic wit shows in fullest brilliancy, and it is a pity that English cant, which has influenced our manners, should deprive us of those jolly, if somewhat broad farces, in which the comicalness of the expression makes one forget the somewhat licentious details. Scarron, by the innate character of his style, clings to the old idiom, and by comparison with several of his contemporaries he is somewhat archaic, the burlesque style being composed of innumerable proverbial expressions, familiar locutions, and popular idioms, which long persisted in conversation after having been banished from the more elevated style. What we have said of Scarron may be said of other and more illustrious writers. Molière, although he writes at the same time as Racine, uses a language which is a hundred years older. We do not mean to cast any blame upon him in saying this, for in our opinion Molière's language is one of the finest which man has ever spoken; we mean only that tragedy, at least as the Classicists understand it, contains fewer idioms than comedy.

Boileau is not very kind to Scarron, and to his "Typhon" in particular. Every one knows these lines of the "Art of Poetry": —

"... The court, at last enlightened,
Distinguished between simplicity and dull buffoonery,
And left it to the provinces to admire 'Typhon.'"

But Boileau, apart from the haughty delicacy of his taste, possibly had a grudge against Scarron. Giles Boileau, the poet's elder brother, had waged with our author a war of epigrams. He had even gone so far as to attack Madame Scarron's virtue in the following:—

"Pray see on what you found your mistaken notion,
Scarron, when you think that all society
Visits you your conversation to enjoy.
What! can you not see, fool that you are,
That if you scratched that head of yours
The reason you soon would guess?"

Scarron, exceedingly angered, replied by a deluge of epigrams which do not all, it must be confessed, savour of Attic salt, but rather of coarse saltpetre. He replies to Giles' insults by charging him with walking at night on the Mégisserie quay, the Champs-Élysées of the day, for equivocal and monstrous assignations. It was then the habit of scholars and literary men who quarrelled to turn to Sodom and Gomorrah for insulting epithets. In this case, at least, the cruelty of the attack excuses the violence of the retort.

"Typhon," which, Boileau himself acknowledged, began well and wittily, is dedicated to his Eminence Cardinal Jules Mazarin. The dedication exhibits a curious likeness to the "Mazarinade" by the same author. Scarron calls Mazarin a great man, a Julius greater than the great Julius, the Alcides on whom Atlas may lean when he is weary; he beseeches him to cast from the summit of his Olympus a glance upon the poor poet; if he obtains it, he will be as pleased as if he had recovered health and as if, being no longer impotent, he could make a deep bow to his Eminence. It would appear that either Mazarin did not particularly appreciate the compliment, or that, foreseeing some largesse which he was expected to make, some new pension to be paid (Scarron had one already from the Queen), he turned a deaf ear to the appeal and destroyed the hopes which the poet had built upon his dedication.

Scarron's admiration for the great Julius died out forthwith, and a complete change took place in his appreciation of the scarlet minister. It was in this new frame of mind that he wrote the "Mazarinade." It would be hard to go further in the way of outrage and filth; it resembles Juvenal's work without its righteous

indignation. Looking at it from the literary point of view simply, the piece, which is very long, contains passages of remarkable fire, spirit, and wit, but of that atrocious wit with which Catullus lights up his epigrams against Mamurra. He reproaches the Cardinal, among other crimes, — and no doubt it was the blackest in his eyes, — with keeping his purse closed to the poor devils called poets, cherished by the late red-capped Richelieu, who feared above all things to see his high deeds tarnished by these divine starving ones. He brings up against him the ballet of "Orpheus," which put every one to sleep; his choir of male soprani; his courtesans; his guards; his two hundred dressing-gowns; his amber and musk perfumes; his card-playing; his double loves in which he exhibited himself as a man to women, and as a woman to men; and many another peccadillo of the same sort, which the Cardinal, accustomed as he was to the excesses of the pamphleteers, would not have minded, for he had taken for his motto, "Let them sing, provided they pay." But Scarron does not stop there; he cuts the Cardinal to the quick by relating the story of his loves with a fruit girl of Alcala, — an adventure which had cost him a thrashing and the good graces of his patron,

Cardinal Colonna. Not a single detail is omitted. Scarron tells how, driven out of Alcala, Mazarin goes off on foot, in very humble fashion, to Barcelona, whence he returns to his country the best way he can, and sets about rebuilding his fortunes by filling, in the household of a purple-robed Jupiter, the office of Ganymede. Then he casts up at him his political blunders and crimes. He upbraids him for his insolent simony in the matter of benefices; for having twice failed to take Lerida; he recalls Courtrai evacuated by the garrison, thanks to his trickery; the fruits of the battle of Lens lost through his delays; Catalonia in despair; the Duke of Guise wretchedly lodged in Naples, where he is abandoned; the Duke of Beaufort caged; the duchy of Cardone stolen; the late Chief-Justice Barillon poisoned; parliament outraged; the English whom he is starving to death; their unhappy Queen whom he has robbed of her rings, and I know not how many black deeds more or less true, in return for which he hopes to see —

> "His disembowelled carcass
> Torn to pieces by the rabble."

We have quoted merely the gentlest insults; the others are marked by a virulence which the Latins

themselves have not surpassed. His burlesque wit is carried to the point of ferocity; his pleasantries are too literally bloody, his poetic anger turns to rage, and one is amazed that there could be so much bitterness in that little wizened body. Father Duchêne pales by the side of Scarron, who carries very far indeed resentment for the neglect of a dedication and a handsome binding. Mazarin, who was clever enough to laugh at good hits in the pamphlets and songs written against him, thought this time that the joke was rather too strong and the style rather too free; nevertheless, it does not appear that he sought to be avenged for it.

Scarron's apartment was the meeting place of the Frondeurs. This was the name given, as is well known, to the partisans of the Parliament, while those who stood up for the royal authority were called Mazarins. The Prince of Condé did not go there himself, but he sent members of his household. There were privately read "The Advice of Ten Millions and more," "The Burlesque Courier of the War in Paris," "The Juliad," "The Bird's Song," "The Frondeur Triolets."

Mazarin's people also had their poets and their writers. Cyrano de Bergerac, who belonged to the

Cardinal's party, launched, by way of a reply to Scarron, whom he designates by the transparent anagram Ronscar, an epistle most slashingly written. Cyrano, whose numerous duels, fought on account of the shape of his nose, caused him to appear, even when writing, like a hectoring bully, treats poor Scarron most contemptuously. He tells him that he has never seen any ridicule so serious or any seriousness so ridiculous as his; he accuses him of having degraded Virgil, and calls him an angry frog croaking in the marshes of Parnassus. He affirms that what Scarron writes is fit only for fishwives, and that when the slang of the market-place changes, Scarron will cease to be understood. Then, passing to a description of the man himself, he declares that if Death wanted to dance a saraband, it would take a pair of Ronscars for castanets. For ten years past the Fates have twisted his neck without succeeding in choking him. To see his arms twisted and stiffened upon his hips, his body might be mistaken for a gallows on which the devil had hanged a soul. And such a soul! More hideous than its body. That deformed monster, allowed to remain on earth as a living example of the vengeance of God, has dared to vomit its slime

and venom upon the purple of a prince of the Church who, under the auspices of Louis, directs so successfully the greatest state in Christendom. The sight of a scarlet hat drives him wild, like a bull or a turkey-cock, and he even refused to listen to "a sweet sonnet" of Cyrano's, and forced the person who had opened it to put it back in his pocket. — Certainly we cannot doubt that Cyrano de Bergerac did profess great admiration for Cardinal Mazarin and was entirely devoted to him, and yet that little rather sweet sonnet, "which must have seemed tasteless to so highly spiced a man," had probably something to do with this exhibition of wrath.

Scarron, moreover, was unlucky with dedications. His father, who was a man of curious temper, a sort of Cynical philosopher, queer and strange in his behaviour, was imprudent enough to enter into a plot with some of the councillors in order to traverse a design which the Cardinal-Duke Armand de Richelieu was greatly bent on carrying out. The wearer of the scarlet robe was not accustomed to deal gently with political pranks, and yet he showed comparative clemency when he was satisfied with exiling Councillor Scarron to Touraine. Fortunately for him, the good

man had some property near Amboise. Thither he withdrew, and kept quiet. Our poet, who knew the Cardinal to bear a grudge as long as a Spaniard and to be as vindictive as a Corsican, allowed some time to pass. When he thought that the Cardinal's resentment at the affair had died down, he ventured to address a petition to his Eminence, a step which had been rendered the more necessary owing to the fact that during the absence of Scarron senior the stepmother, who had remained in Paris, had left no stone unturned to get possession of all the property, and that the pension of the poor invalid, as may be readily believed, was not very regularly paid. In this petition, one of his best poems, he begs of his lordship the Cardinal to pardon his father, whom he excuses to the best of his ability. Since that unfortunate exile, Paul, son of Paul, had fallen a victim to a very dangerous malady: —

> "It is poverty, which destroys all minds
> And all bodies when them it takes.
> It seized on me when that poor father mine,
> Who to you alone looks for recovery,
> Was seized with a certain ill one gets in Parliament
> And which nowhere else is to be feared.
> This disease, named a zeal for investigation,
> Is in our day making many a head sore."

While asking leave for his father to return, he asks also to be given some small benefice, but he does this in a timid, side fashion, and merely to put his name down for a vacancy. The petition closes with these four verses, — that is, in vile prose in the year 1642 : —

> "Done at Paris on this last day of October,
> By me, Scarron, who against my will am sober,
> In the year that famous Perpignan was taken,
> And without a cannon-shot the town of Sedan."

This was flattering the Cardinal in a way to which he was very sensitive; so when Scarron's epistle was read to him, he approved of it as rather neatly turned, and repeated several times that it was amusingly dated. Unfortunately, the poet was unable to benefit by the good-will of his Eminence, who died very shortly afterwards, — an event which Scarron deplores in this wise in another petition addressed to the King : —

> "I have been for four years past a victim to a hideous ill,
> Which seeks to destroy me.
> It makes me weep like a calf, very often like a couple,
> Sometimes like four of them.
> Close pressed by my misfortunes I sought to present
> A petition to the Cardinal ;
> So some lines I wrote by dint of scratching
> My ear and my head.
> That great statesman listened to my plea

And thought it neat ;
But hereupon came death to carry him away,
And brought to me naught."

Thanks to the protection of Mlle. de Hautefort, he had been presented to the Queen, who deigned to permit him to call himself her invalid by appointment, a function which he fulfilled in the most conscientious way possible. The Queen granted him a present of five hundred crowns. By dint of petitions and requests, importunities and protection, he succeeded in having this gift changed into a sort of pension, paid as regularly as it could be in view of the troubled times and the disordered finances. Scarron, who had borne the title of abbé gratuitously for nearly forty years, would have been glad to justify it by the possession of some benefice, a priory, a prebend, or something else ; but the licentious life he had led and the buffoonery which formed his stock in trade were scarcely compatible with clerical functions, even if his infirmities had not made it impossible for him to discharge these. He asked for a benefice which would call for so little work that, to do it, it would be enough to believe in God. It was again Mlle. de Hautefort, his good angel, who gained for him the satisfaction of his con-

stant desire. She induced Monsignor de Lavardin, Bishop of Mans, where she had an estate, to offer a benefice in his diocese to poor Scarron, whose undoubted paralysis allowed the most prudish women to support and recommend him as warmly as possible. Our poet, satisfied on this point, had yet another ambition, which was never fulfilled, that of being given apartments in the Louvre. The hope that this would be done was long held out to him, but he had to be satisfied with the hope.

It would be a mistake, after all, to allow these complaints of wretchedness and distress to lead us to believe that Scarron was really poverty-stricken. That sort of poetical mendicancy was then fashionable and in no way dishonourable. Authors sought to gain protectors, to obtain gifts, pensions, or pecuniary assistance by means of flattering sonnets, of prefatory epistles, or of dedications. As the court was the supreme arbiter, and as a word from a duke, a smile from a marchioness sufficed to make a work fashionable, it was natural that authors should endeavour to win the good opinion of persons of high station by all possible cajolery; and every one knows that in the way of flattery there can be none too gross,

especially for courtiers who are accustomed to consider themselves as the paragon and acme of all perfections. Expressions which to-day strike us as so abject did not degrade the persons who made use of them, any more than the formulæ which are still used nowadays at the end of a letter. Then it must not be forgotten that in those days nobles and titled persons were considered as belonging to a superior race, as visible deities, of whom it was no more humiliating to ask for favours than to ask of God himself, so great was the distance which separated the protector from the protégé. No doubt the dignity of man seems to have gained by the pride which writers nowadays exhibit. They no longer prefix to their books epistles on bended knees, in which the author sets above the Mæcenas of antiquity an ass of a nobleman, in the hope of being repaid with a few crowns; but, on the other hand, they no longer frequent high society, and no longer live on an intimate footing with princes and men of rank. Reduced to their own resources, they are bound down to incessant work and must all lack leisure, the tenth Muse, and the most inspiring of all. If they do not sacrifice their pride, they have to sacrifice their art; the honour

of the individual is untouched, but the glory of the poet declines.

Scarron, though he pretended that he was lodged in Poverty House, really lived in a rather pretty home. His bedchamber was hung with yellow damask, and the furniture had cost six thousand crowns. He wore a velvet dress, ate well, had several servants, and kept up his establishment in fairly good style. The pension he received from the Queen, that given him by his father, the income from his benefice, and the money he made from his books must have abundantly met his expenses. His "marquisate of Quinet" — that was the name he gave to the income from his books; his bookseller was called Quinet — brought him in handsome sums, so he was not to be pitied quite as much as he claimed; if he suffered all the torments of Job, he was at least never reduced to sitting on a dunghill and scraping himself with a shard. His dunghill was a very comfortable armchair, admirably upholstered, with arms and a board so arranged that he could work when gout did not torture him too much. He even had a secretary, or a lackey who acted as such, if we may believe these lines: —

"And the valet whom I employed to write,
Another demon who was never seen to laugh,
And whose indifferent and cold ways
Would have made even a monk swear right out,
Ceasing at last to be my servant,
Rid me of a glum lunatic."

He met frequently and on familiar terms the Countess du Lude, Mme. de la Suze, Mme. de Bassompierre, M. de Villequier, the Prince and Princess of Guémenée, Mme. de Blérancourt, the Duchess de Rohan, Mme. de Maugiron, Mme. de Bois-Dauphin, M. de Courcy, Major Aubry, Sarrazin, la Ménardière, and many others, his neighbours, who lived in the Place Royale or near it, and to whom he refers in some compliment or kindly mention in his farewell to the Marais, when he went to take tripe baths, at the Charity Hospital in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, in the hope of relieving his sufferings. The tripe baths were no more efficacious than the Bourbon waters which he had gone to take, and which had not even succeeded, as he comically says, in changing his worse into a simple ill. If these trips did not contribute to the recovery of his health, they at least served his fortunes. He met numbers of fine acquaintances, and established

many connections with illustrious personages. The two "Legends of Bourbon," which may be classed among his most agreeable poems, gave him an opportunity of introducing all sorts of graceful remarks and flattering lines to the great personages whom he had met at the baths. It was there that he acquired a protector in the person of Gaston de France, Duke of Orléans, brother of Louis XIII, who deigned to inquire after the health of the poor devil and appeared to be interested in him. He bestirred himself to have Scarron senior recalled from exile; but whether he did not espouse his cause warmly enough, or whether Richelieu's resentment was still unappeased, the recalcitrant councillor was not recalled, and he died at Loches, in Touraine, without other diversion than the companionship of his friend Deslandes-Payen, a councillor of the High Court, Prior of Charité-sur-Loire, and Abbé of Mont-Saint-Martin.

The Duke of Saint-Aignan in particular was so tickled with a passage which referred to him in the "Legends of Bourbon" that he expressed his thanks to Scarron in a versified epistle of his own, to which the latter did not fail to reply. But those who welcomed him most warmly at Bourbon were

a M. Fransaiche and his wife, who took him to their house, where he spent a month, gorged with good cheer and delicacies; for amid all the ravage caused in our burlesque poet by disease, his appetite had not been touched; his stomach seemed to have drawn to itself the life which gradually left the rest of his body. He was as fond of good eating as a devotee's cat, and left tid-bits to one side only to get better. So he speaks with a gratitude which gives you an appetite of the Maine capons and the partridge pasties which the ladies d'Hautefort and d'Escars gave him.

People of the highest rank often had dinner and supper parties at his house. The wine was good, the dishes choice, and the conversation of the brightest. It is probable that his illustrious guests did not let him bear the whole expense, that they sent him hampers of game, and baskets of wine, and that Scarron's share was only the table and the joints. Pretty faces even were not absent from the poet's home, although he was not yet married. He had taken into his house his father's two sisters by his first marriage, Anne and Frances. One of them had a nice figure, a charming voice, and was clever. The Duke de Trêmes, who fre-

quented the home, took a fancy to her and paid her attentions which were received so favourably that a child was born. This child later married a lady called Anne de Thibourt, and became equerry to Mme. de Maintenon. Scarron was far from posing as a rigorous brother, and he said of his sisters that one was fond of drink and the other of men. This succinct appreciation appears to us to be justified. He also pretended that in Twelve Gates Street there were twelve light o' loves, counting the two Misses Scarron as one only. That poor street of the Marais is no longer gay, and virtue reigns in it between mouldy walls.

Although crippled in every limb, Scarron had a lively imagination. The reading of the Spanish authors, whom he studied assiduously (for he was very well acquainted with that tongue), filled his head with romantic adventures. A friend of his, Madaillan, resolved to play a joke upon him. He wrote him letters signed with a woman's name, and appointed a number of meetings to which the poor devil had himself carried in a bath chair, his only available mode of locomotion. Of course he only appeared at the rendezvous, and he understood that he had been tricked. Previously, however, a poetic correspondence had been entered upon

between the mysterious lady and the paralytic gallant. He found it hard to forgive Madaillan for his joke, spoke of him in terms of grossest insult, and long bore him a grudge. Yet he had been duped by self-love only, and he alone had been the practical joker who had taken him in; for how could he have dared to believe for a moment that he had inspired a woman with a passion, or even a caprice. It is true that he reckoned upon the brightness of his wit and his literary reputation, which was considerable, to make her forget his bodily defects. Ill-favoured and deformed poets are always ready to believe in that queenly kiss which alighted on the lips of the sleeping Alain Chartier, although he was one of the ugliest of men. No doubt, too, our poet was so dried up that he caught fire easily. We beg to be allowed this poor conceit which he would not have refused himself the pleasure of uttering, in spite of the horror that, according to Cyrano de Bergerac, he professed for anything with a point to it.

It is not to vanity but to the goodness of his heart alone that the following action is to be attributed. Having learned that a certain Céleste de Palaiseau, whom he had loved before his illness, was in a condition bordering on indigence, he took her into his own

home and exerted himself to such good effect that he obtained for her the priory of Argenteuil, which brought in an income of two thousand livres. The poor woman was born under an unlucky star; for she was weak enough and imprudent enough to resign her priory to a lady who literally allowed her to die of want.

To wind up these biographical details, let us come to the time when Scarron met Mlle. d'Aubigné, who later became his wife, and, later still, queen of France, with the title of Madame de Maintenon. If ever there was a life made up of adventures and ups and downs, it was unquestionably that of Mlle. d'Aubigné. It is as strange as truth, and yet no one would dare to write so improbable a novel. Mlle. d'Aubigné was descended from that famous d'Aubigné who made a name for himself under Henry III with the "Confessions of Sancy," and the "Satirical Divorce," — dashing and sparkling works written in a style of remarkable firmness and energy. We shall not take up time by telling the story of Mlle. d'Aubigné, which is well enough known and which may be read in all sorts of books without our taking the trouble to transcribe it. On her return from America Madame d'Aubigné lodged with her daughter, then only fourteen years old, opposite Scarron's house.

The new neighbours gradually became acquainted, and our burlesque poet, who, in spite of his coarse pleasantries, was very kind-hearted, became interested in the misfortunes of Madame d'Aubigné, who was in most precarious circumstances. The girl struck him as being very charming, and he offered to marry her. Though he was impotent and twisted into the oddest of shapes, his proposal was not rejected, the only objection offered being that Mlle. d'Aubigné was much too young. It was agreed to delay the marriage for a couple of years; at the end of that time it was celebrated. Mother and daughter must have been brought very low to consent to such a match. It may be that they asked for the delay of two years in the hope that something better would turn up; but this was not the case, since Mlle. d'Aubigné became Madame Scarron. The following letter was written by Scarron to Mlle. d'Aubigné at the beginning of their intercourse, and is rather interesting: —

"I had always suspected that the little girl I saw six months ago come into my rooms with a dress too short for her and who began to cry, I know not why, was as clever as she seemed to be. The letter you wrote to Mlle. de Saint-Hermant is so bright that I am ill satis-

fied with my own cleverness, which did not make me perceive all the merit of yours soon enough. To tell the truth, I should have never supposed that the art of writing clever letters was taught in the islands of America or at the convent in Niort, and I cannot imagine why you should have been as careful to conceal your talents as every one else is to display his. Now that you are found out, you must not refuse to write to me as well as to Mlle. Saint-Hermant. I shall do my best to write letters as clever as yours, and you shall have the pleasure of seeing that I am far less talented than you are."

In another letter occurs this passage: "I am not sure that I should not have been wiser had I been on my guard against you the very first time I saw you. As things have turned out, I ought certainly to have been so; but pray, what likelihood was there that a young maid would upset an old bachelor; and who could have suspected that she could trouble me enough to make me regret my inability to take my revenge? A plague on me for loving you! How foolish I am to be so much in love! Every minute I feel like starting off for Poitou, and, considering the bitter cold, is it not a piece of madness? By Jove, come back, — since I am mad

enough to set about regretting an absent beauty. I ought to have known myself better and to have remembered that it is sufficient to be crippled from head to foot, without suffering besides from that devilish sickness which is called impatience to see you again."

Is it not a strange sight and one affording food for reflection, to see the girl who later shared, or almost shared, the throne of France, enter into the humble abode of a poet with a skirt too short for her, for she had grown since it had been cut out and she had been too poor to buy another? And that ass Scarron, who wonders why she was crying! Why was she crying? Because her dress was not long enough. Is not that a sound reason, a genuine woman's reason?

Before he could marry, Scarron had to give up his benefice, which he sold to a valet of Ménage, a clever fellow whom his master was helping along. He also parted with a small estate which he had somewhere in Maine, and for which M. de Nublé handsomely paid him twenty-four thousand livres, the price of eighteen thousand livres, which had been put upon it at first, being below its real value. In spite of his marriage, Scarron, thanks to that desire for change of scene which is characteristic of invalids, had long entertained

the notion of going to Martinique, whence one of his friends had returned completely cured of pains such as he suffered from. In a letter to Sarrazin, he states this intention in explicit terms: "I have therefore invested a thousand crowns in the new company of the Indies, which is about to found a colony three degrees from the equator on the banks of the Orillana and the Orinoco. Farewell to friends! farewell to Paris! farewell to you, tigresses disguised as angels! Farewell to the Ménages, to the Sarrazins, to the Marignys. I renounce burlesque verse, comic poems, and comedies, to go to a country where there are no sham saints, no rascally devotees, no Inquisition, no murderous winter, no crippling rheumatism, no worry to reduce me to starvation."

His match with Mlle. d'Aubigné was sure to revive the project, which, however, was never carried out. The course of events is truly wonderful. If through a combination of circumstances Scarron had not been prevented from carrying out his purpose, Mlle. d'Aubigné, now his wife, would have returned to America and the close of Louis XIV's reign would have been, no doubt, quite different. Mme. de Maintenon's influence was very great over the King, as

he grew old and inclined to be morose, an inclination which she favoured, either to secure her influence or because of a religious feeling on her part which there is no reason to believe insincere. Although Mme. de Maintenon was something of a coquette, going so far as to be bled very frequently in order to preserve the delicate whiteness which was one of her chief beauties, the hard lessons which she had learned in adversity, and the many ups and downs of her fortune, must have filled her mind with a grave and sad feeling of the vanity of sublunary things. The woman who had slept between Ninon's sheets and under the roof of a poor deformed poet must, when she slept in the alcoves of Versailles, with their gold-embroidered hangings, have dreamed strange dreams, and wondered at times whether she was really herself. It is not surprising that Mme. de Maintenon should have regretted, at the height of her glory, the bright, gay, and unconventional home of Scarron, and the days when she made up for the lack of roast by telling a story; for Scarron was not so difficult to move to laughter as Louis XIV, of whom she said that she was getting tired at last of trying to divert a man who could no longer be diverted. In that royal home, which was growing more and more

sombre, entered then black-gowned men, confessors prowled around, and the Edict of Nantes, the dragonnades of the Cevennes, the Chamillard ministry were being slowly prepared and organised. On what did all this depend? On a few pistoles; on a little more or a little less rheumatism. Cromwell did not board the vessel which was to carry him away to Jamaica for want of a pair of boots. If the stern Puritan had possessed those boots, Charles I would have kept his head on his shoulders. If Mme. Scarron had returned to America, Louis XIV would probably have continued to indulge in ballets, carousals, and love affairs; the deadly dulness of the later years of his reign would not have brought about the prolonged debauch of the Regency and the orgies of Louis XV, when the nobility indulged in such excesses that the Revolution became absolutely indispensable as a reaction and an adjustment. It takes so little to sway and turn from its course at its source a whole stream of events.

When the marriage settlements were drawn up, the notary asked Scarron what he acknowledged to have been the fortune brought by his future wife. "Two great, very self-willed eyes, a very handsome figure, a pair of beautiful hands, and a very great deal of talent,"

he replied. "What dower do you settle on her?" added the notary. "Immortality," continued the poet; "the names of kings' wives die with them, that of Scarron's wife will live forever."

Madame Scarron introduced into her husband's home order, seemliness, and if not quiet, decency at least, and a more respectable playfulness. She transformed the doleful home of the sick old bachelor, where vials of medicine stood cheek by jowl with bottles of wine; and if the company was as numerous as it was before, it was at least more choice and more reserved. Through her gentle influence Scarron, who was very cynical and Rabelaisian in his freedom of speech, cured himself of his filthy jokes and equivocal remarks. In all he wrote after his marriage, one notes pleasantries in better taste and a diminution of coarseness, and especially of obscenity. It must not be believed, however, that our burlesque poet was completely reformed; such marked originality as his could not repress itself to such an extent. He allowed himself a good deal of license still, and carried out the programme which he had laid out when he was married: "I shall never behave improperly to my wife, but I shall often tell her very improper things."

Well, that little, deformed, sick, ridiculous man avoided the misfortune which the greatest men, the brightest geniuses have not always managed to escape. His wife, beautiful, young, witty, courted by the most gallant, the most illustrious, and the wealthiest men of the day, remained strictly faithful to him ; a fact which no one has ever questioned save Giles Boileau, and which was acknowledged by the most slanderous writers of the day, among others by Sorbière. While so many young, loving, charming husbands are betrayed in favour of pot-bellies or asses, Scarron, the carved mandragora, escaped that which made Molière's life unhappy. The author of " Virgil Travestied " deserves to have it said that he did not take undue advantage of his conjugal rights and did not deceive himself in this respect.

Scarron was in rather easy circumstances at this time. He had, with the protection of Fouquet, the Director-General of Finances, organised a sort of surety company for carriages which reached the city gates, and which he then had driven to their destination in the city by trusty agents who became responsible for the duties. This business brought him in about six thousand livres a year. Besides his tales and his comic poems, Scarron wrote for the stage and com-

posed several plays which brought him in a good deal of money. "Jodelet, Master and Valet" was performed in 1645. The subject is drawn from a Spanish play by Don Francesco de Rojas, called "Don Juan Alvaredo." In the same year "Jodelet the Duellist" was produced at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, under the title of "The Three Dorotheas," and appeared in book form under its present title only in 1651. "The Whims of Captain Hector," drawn from the "Miles Gloriosus" of Plautus, was performed in 1646, — for Scarron was endowed with extraordinary facility. It was remarkable for being written in octosyllabic verse on one rime. The assonance chosen by the poet is *ment*. "The Ridiculous Heir, or the Interested Lady" appeared in 1649. This play so greatly delighted King Louis XIV that he had it performed, it is said, three times in one day. We have read it, and confess that a single performance would more than satisfy us. The vile, odious character of Donna Helena, the interested lady, the boastfulness and the bulls of Filipin the valet, — whom his master disguises as Don Pedro de Buffalos in order to test the interested lady, who does not fail to think him delightful, believing him the owner of all the mines of Peru, — all this spiced with

artless remarks by Carmagnole the lackey, does not seem to us to deserve such enthusiasm. It may be, of course, that the anecdote is apocryphal.

If ever a man found a fortunate and convenient subject, it is that of "Don Japhet of Armenia," one of Scarron's finest plays. Don Japhet thus presents himself and states who he is: —

> "For me, I am Don Japhet, of Noah the grandson;
> Of Armenia is my name, by a previous order
> Left before his death by that famous patriarch;
> For in Armenia it was that on the mount rested the ark."

Two of the doorkeepers were crushed to death at the performance of "Don Japhet," so great was the crowd. The first performance took place in 1663. Condensed into three acts with intermissions of song and dance, "Don Japhet" was played on May 10, 1721, before King Louis XV on the stage of the *Salle des Machines* in the Tuileries. The Turkish ambassador, Mehemet Effendi, was present. It was on the stage of the Marais that "The Scholar of Salamanca" was given in 1634. This is the first play in which Crispin appears. The same subject was treated simultaneously by Thomas Corneille and Boisrobert. The latter's play was performed at the Hôtel de Bourgogne that

same year, and it is likely that he took advantage of Scarron having read his own play to friends from the manuscript, as was his habit, to work up as quickly as he could a tragi-comedy based on the same plot. We shall not dwell upon "The Corsair Prince," "The False Appearances" and a few other comedies, of which fragments alone have been published, but shall give, to acquaint our readers with Scarron's style, a summary of "Jodelet."

Don Juan Alvaredo arrives in Madrid by night, and is so eager to conclude his marriage with Donna Isabella, the daughter of Don Fernando, that before putting up at any inn, or taking time to eat or drink, he insists on going to the house of his future father-in-law, in spite of the wise remonstrances of his lackey Jodelet, who would dearly love to have a bite, and thinks it is very absurd to wake up people and to go hunting through a city for a house that you do not know. Don Juan is madly in love with Isabella, though he has seen her portrait only. He has sent her his own, the work of a Flemish painter, believing that it will produce the same effect on her. Jodelet does not seem quite so sure as Don Juan on this point. He has a very good reason for it, namely that, being

the incarnation of absent-mindedness, he has sent off, instead of the medallion containing his master's portrait, his own ugly mug, which the Flemish painter, an easy-going fellow, had been good enough to paint into the bargain. On his confessing this, his lordship Alvaredo enters into a great rage. "What will Isabella have thought?" cries the despairing lover. "She will have said that you are not handsome," replies Jodelet, with the most aggravating coolness. Finally Don Juan cools down somewhat, and, while trying to find the house of Don Fernando de Rojas, he relates that on his returning from Flanders to Burgos he found that his brother had been killed in a duel and his sister Lucretia carried off, though he knows neither by whom nor how. As they proceed in the darkness Jodelet knocks up against a fellow whom he questions, and who tells them that the house in front of which they are is the residence of Don Fernando de Rojas. While this conversation is going on, a man climbs down from the balcony and nearly drives the travellers' sombreros down over their eyes with his foot. He calls for Stephen, and seeing that it is Jodelet who replies, he flees, not before he has exchanged a few futile passes in the darkness with Don Juan Alvaredo.

"Is it the custom in Madrid to make use of windows as doors?" asks Jodelet of his master, who, very much upset and abashed, begins to have a poor opinion of Isabella's virtue. In order to find out the actual state of affairs, he proposes that Jodelet shall wear his dress and play in Don Fernando's house the part of his master, a plan which the mistake made in the sending of the portraits renders the more feasible. Thanks to this disguise, Don Juan Alvaredo learns that Don Louis, the man whom he saw coming down from the balcony, had seduced Lucretia and killed his brother. Lucretia, by a romantic chance, happened to seek refuge with Donna Isabella. Don Louis atones for his wrongs and restores honour to her whom he had seduced; Don Juan Alvaredo marries Isabella, who has fallen in love with him, although she took him for a servant, but managed to recognise the master's soul under the dress of the valet. As for Master Jodelet, the number of blunders, of absurdities, of amazing stupidities which he manages to commit, is beyond our power to sum up. His part is unquestionably one of the most naturally buffoon that exists. It was written for a very talented actor, called Julien Geoffrin, whose stage name was Jodelet and who played all the Jodelet

parts. This actor entered the troupe of the Hôtel de Bourgogne by order of the king. He it was who played the part of Don Japhet of Armenia and who contributed greatly to the success of Scarron's plays.

These plays, which Scarron dashed off in three or four weeks at most, are all composed after the Spanish model, without the least regard for the rules of Aristotle. Our burlesque poet adopts the precept of Lope de Vega, which was to lock up the Precepts with six keys when one wanted to write a comedy. The scene is now in a street, now in a garden, now in a room or on a balcony. Duels, unexpected encounters, disguises, elopements, masks, dark lanterns, and rope-ladders abound; some ridiculous or stupid valet plays the part of the clown. The style, which is precious and affected in scenes of love or gallantry, is in general familiar, easy, realistic, which is the distinct mark of Scarron's manner. In most of his comedies, as was then the fashion, couplets are introduced. In the second act of "Jodelet" there is a parody of the "Cid," written in stanzas, which begins thus: —

"Be clean, my teeth, for honour wills it."

But Scarron's masterpiece is unquestionably the "Comic Romance," which is a perfect model of

naturalness, of narration and originality. Nothing can be more unlike "The Illustrious Bassa," "Clelia," "The Orondates," "The Great Cyrus" and other contemporary trash. The only works which can be compared with it are the Spanish Picaresque novels, among which are included "Lazarillo de Tormés," "Gusman d'Alfarache," "El Diablo Cojuelo" and a good many more.

The action of the "Comic Romance" occurs in the neighbourhood of Mans, which Scarron had visited and which he describes with the accuracy and skill of a man who paints from nature. The characters are no less cleverly drawn than the places. We seem to witness the misadventures which befall Ragotin, so accurate is the detail, so true the gesture, so clearly is the scene indicated. The characters of La Rancune, the comedian, of Ragotin, the lawyer, have become typical; le Destin, Mademoiselle de l'Estoile, and Mademoiselle Lacaverne live in all minds. Even the stout Bouvillon has the stamp of reality so firmly impressed that we seem to have known her. Besides, the prose is excellent, free, and rapid, irresistible in its gaiety, lending itself admirably to the familiar style, and, although more inclined to be comic, not lacking a

certain tender grace and poetic feeling in the amorous and romantic passages. Mademoiselle de l'Estoile is a charming figure, a delightful incarnation of poesy. Which of us, in imagination at least, has not followed as did le Destin along the rutty roads of Mans, some Mademoiselle de l'Estoile upon the play-actors' mud-bespattered cart? Is it not the old story of youth and its illusions?

The first part of "The Comic Romance" is dedicated to Cardinal de Retz, coadjutor-archbishop of Paris, who was a friend of Scarron and who visited him frequently; the second to the wife of the Director-General of Finances, with whom Madame Scarron was on a footing of friendship, as may be seen from a passage in a letter of Scarron to Marshal d'Albret: "Madame Scarron went to Saint-Mandé to visit Madame d'Emmeri, and I find that she is so smitten with her charms that I fear there may be some impure motive; but as she never goes there save when taken by friends, not having a carriage of her own, she cannot pay her court as often as she would wish." The success of "The Comic Romance" was so great that La Fontaine did not disdain to write a comedy on the adventures of La Rancune. As a general rule, in this play

he has merely versified Scarron's prose. "The Comic Romance" contains also many very pleasant tales imitated or translated from the Spanish. Besides these, Scarron has written some others drawn from the collection of Donna Maria de Layas, called "Novelas Ejemplares." "The Punishment of Avarice," as one might say, is an interlinear translation of "El Castigo de la Miseria." And this was not — far from it — the only time that our burlesque poet borrowed from Spanish literature.

A single volume would not suffice to name all the plays and miscellaneous verse of Scarron, — sonnets, epithalamia, requests, New Year addresses, epistles, rondeaus, burlesque odes, drinking songs. Unable to walk and not having much other distraction, he wrote almost incessantly. When it is remembered that he possessed great facility, it will be easily understood that his collected works are very considerable. The two "Legends of Bourbon," the "Farewell to the Marais," "The Fair of Saint-Germain," "Hero and Leander," the "Petitions to the Queen," the "Epistles to the Countess of Fieschi," the "Letter to His Friend Sarrazin," in trisyllabic verse, his "Sonnet on Paris," and two or three others in which the poetic

emphasis is often wittily quizzed, are most read and most frequently quoted.

Scarron's life was, in some sort, nothing more than a truce between life and death, which might be broken any day. Every year, in spite of the help of medical art and the care taken of him by Quenault and by his wife, his sufferings increased in such fashion as to give him plainly to understand that his end was approaching. His great trouble was that he would leave penniless a young, beautiful, and honest wife, whom he tenderly loved. The Court was then preparing to travel to Guyenne for the marriage of Louis XIV, and the departure of his friends saddened him still more. One day he was seized with such a violent fit of hiccoughs that it was believed that he was dying. In the very short moments of respite between the convulsions, he said, "If I ever recover from this, I shall write a fine satire against hiccoughs." He was unable to fulfil his promise, for he soon fell ill again, and seeing around his bed his household bathed in tears, "My friends," he said, "you will never weep as much for me as I have made you laugh."

He died in 1660, being then fifty, some say in the month of June, others in the month of October. A

passage in Loret's "Historical Muse," of October 16 of that year, seems to strengthen the latter belief:

> "Scarron, that playful wit
> Who has at times praised me,
> Scarron, the creator of burlesque,
> And who in that jargon so grotesque
> Surpassed for more than sixteen years
> The most entertaining writers,
> Has seen himself cut down by the scythe
> That cuts all down.
> He who lived on verse alone
> Now is eaten by worms.
> He sprang from a good family,
> He leaves neither son nor daughter,
> But does leave an amiable wife
> Most worthy of affection,
> For she is young, charming, and fair,
> And most witty in every way."

Scarron was buried in Saint-Gervais, where, unless we are mistaken, his tomb is still to be seen. Madame Scarron was left alone, but not unprotected. The pension which her husband had received, and which amounted to five hundred crowns, was continued in her favour to the amount of two thousand livres. On leaving the convent to which she had withdrawn to spend the days of her widowhood, she became acquainted with Madame de Théanges, who introduced

her to Mme. de Montespan. That was the beginning of her fortune; but it is history and does not concern us, a mere literary biographer, a humble critic seeking for pearls in the dunghill of second-rate writers. When Madame Scarron became the Marchioness of Maintenon a curious thing happened: Scarron, who had so greatly interested the court and the town was no more thought of than if he had never lived; the flattery of the courtiers completely suppressed the comic poet. No one ventured to make the most distant allusion to "Typhon" or to "The Æneid Travestied." Deep silence fell upon the tomb of the poor impotent, and had Madame de Maintenon not been blessed with a good memory, she might very well have forgotten that Mademoiselle d'Aubigné had married poor Scarron. The literary form which he had made popular disappeared with him. In vain did d'Assoucy, hoping to gather in the inheritance of the master, proclaim himself the Emperor of burlesque. Boileau proved stronger, and Scarron had no literary any more than he had natural descendants. It was only when the great king was well and duly buried in Saint-Denis that people dared to remember the works of the poor poet and to republish them.

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